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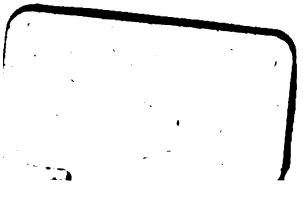

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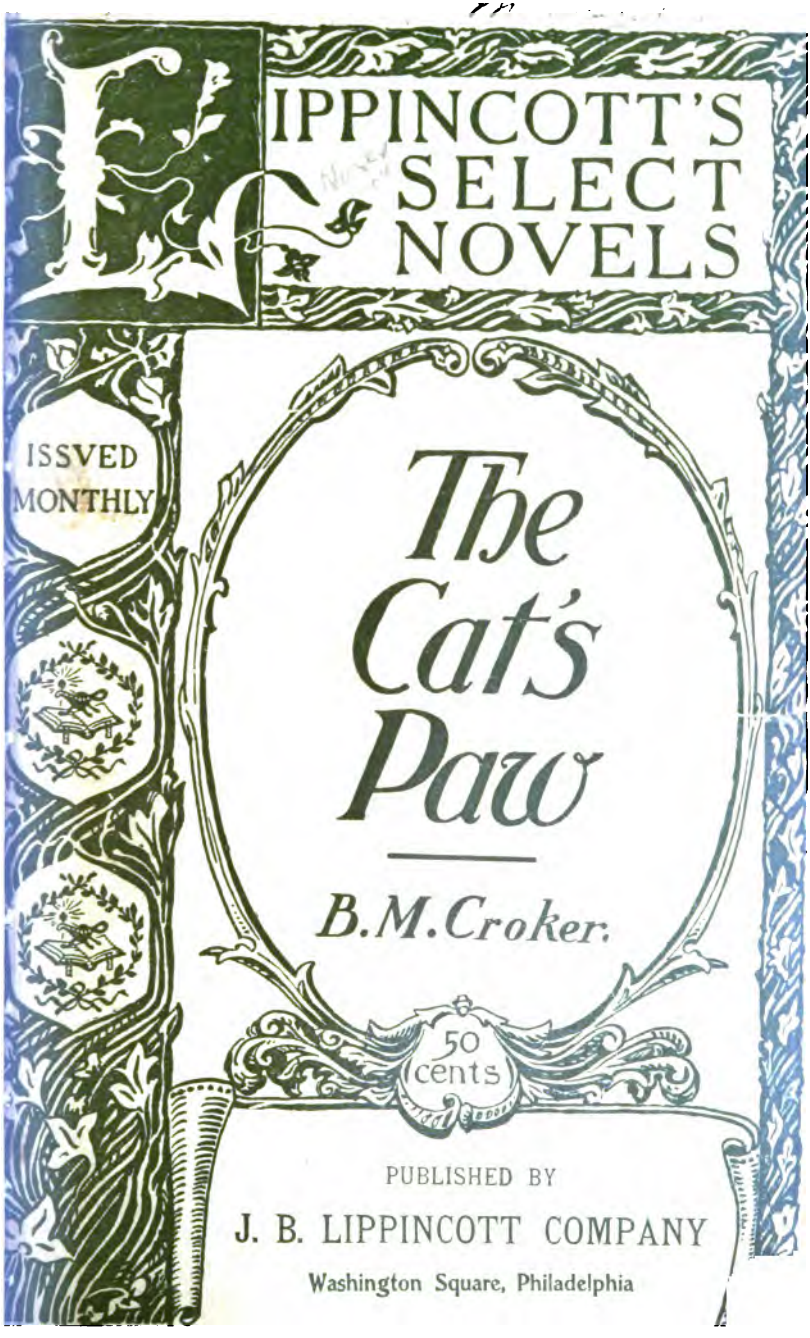
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THE CAT'S-PAW

BY
B. M. CROKER

AUTHOR OF "INFATUATION," "MISS BALMAINE'S PAST,"
"A THIRD PERSON," ETC.

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1902

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TO

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WITH

HER MOTHER'S LOVE

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THE CAT'S-PAW

CHAPTER I

PAST AND FUTURE

THE gale had abated, and the Bay of Biscay was two hundred miles astern, when a fellow-passenger and myself emerged from our narrow quarters, in order to breathe a different atmosphere.

There we sat in the end of the saloon, this bitter New Year's Day, shivering and huddled up in wraps. Within we had a full view of three narrow tables—defended by fiddles—and a series of long-suffering swinging lamps. Without were the hungry seas, which hurried vainly in our wake. There was not a sail, a smoke-stack, nor even a Mother Carey's chicken to be seen.

I glanced at my companion; it was the first time I had had an opportunity of realizing her appearance, although we had passed several days in the same cabin. She was about forty—a truly venerable age in the opinion of one-and-twenty—and had evidently made no attempt to struggle with time. Certainly Mrs. Evans owed nothing to her dress—a new but ill-made blue serge, and a hideous

ginger-coloured shawl. Her abundant dark hair was carelessly gathered back from a broad low brow, beneath which beamed a pair of deep-set, clever eyes. These, with an ugly nose and a large but well-cut mouth, conveyed the impression of a strong face and a personality that attracted me, and I came to the conclusion that my chaperon was a woman whom I could both like and trust. We had met for the first time the evening the *Smyrna* left Tilbury for Bombay, and bad weather had hitherto prevented our improving the acquaintance. There are no convivial opportunities in a four-berth cabin with the dead-lights on.

I had been consigned to the care of Mrs. Evans. She was the cousin of a friend's friend—truly a slender connection on which to urge a favour; but my aunt had no acquaintances who hailed from the far East, and people who have been to India are accustomed to helping the merest strangers: hence the present situation. But we had yet to take one another's measure, and discover if we were likely to coalesce—or otherwise.

My chaperon was staring out, with fixed unseeing gaze, on the tumbling seas that raced after us; her thoughts were far away. Suddenly she heaved a profound sigh, gave her head a little shake, and looked at me interrogatively.

"Yes," she admitted, with a smile, "I was lost in thought. I was thinking how quickly the years vanish after one passes thirty. Here is another first of January, and the last one seems to have occurred about a month ago."

"Then time must indeed have flown," I rejoined; for to me the last twelve months had lagged with leaden feet.

"Nothing flies faster than one's return ticket to Bombay. I have been at home with my chicks; now I'm going back to my good man. That is the bane of India—divided families. Have you been making good resolutions this first of January?"

I smiled, and shook my head.

"I see!"—and she paused significantly. "I have been thinking of the past, you of the future. Alas! all my best days are behind me, whilst yours are yet to come. My dear"—suddenly leaning forward and taking my hand—"I wish you a very happy New Year."

"Thank you," I responded. "I return your wish with interest."

"A most important year for you," she resumed. "Of course I know all about it. You look rather sad and serious, child, when you ought to be a picture of radiant happiness. You are one-and-twenty, fair to see, a capital sailor, and going out to be married to the man you love."

"That is just it; I am not sure if I *do* love him," I answered, with unexpected candour. The words had escaped from my lips almost in spite of myself. "Out of a full heart the mouth speaketh;" and during the last four days, when I lay prone in my berth—in deference to the advice of the motherly stewardess—I had had ample time to review my feelings, to consider my position, and to sit in judgment on my own acts. "And yet he is my sheet-anchor; I have no one else to look to in all the wide world. But why should I trouble you with my affairs?"

"Why not?"—sitting more erect, and considering me steadily with her deep searching eyes. "Am I not your

chaperon—your mother for the voyage? You are low and home-sick, which is even worse than being sea-sick. You miss a kind aunt and cousins, and are situated precisely like Mahomet's coffin. You have left them—you have yet to reach *him*. For my part, I always think a good talk clears one's brain and moral atmosphere. You have been weaving foolish fancies and cobwebs for lack of something to do; for in such weather you could neither read nor write, nor even see. Tell me what has happened to you: you looked so bright and cheery the evening you came on board."

"I suppose it *is* being cooped up in a little dark cabin, and having nothing to do but meditate," I admitted, with a sigh.

"And you prefer action? Personally, I like a solid uninterrupted think, and there is no better position for reflection than on the high seas. It is a resting-place in life, where there are no letters or telegrams, no social duties, no daily employment. You can be as idle as you please. You need not talk; you need not be amusing. You can cast off your every-day character, and be something utterly different. It is not even necessary to be yourself: you are just berth 89! Yes, you, my dear, are looking forward; I am looking back. Come, now, let us exchange thoughts. Shall I begin?"

"Do, please," I responded, rather faintly.

"Then, I suppose you know that my husband is an official in the Woods and Forests, and not too well off? We have been married nineteen years. I came from a wealthy home, and I married for love. We have three children—Dick, Milly, and Aubrey. I am leaving my dear Milly, who is very pretty, impulsive, and strong-willed,

to strangers; Dick is a fine fellow, but inclined to be reckless and careless; and Aubrey, my baby of seven, who has never been parted from me before." She paused for a moment to steady her voice, and I saw that her sunken eyes were full of tears. "When I am with the children I am torn with anxiety about my husband, and when I am with him I am miserable about them. There is my life. My health, too, is indifferent. I suffer from a form of heart disease, and it is dangerous. I may die at any moment, away from all my dear ones; and oh, they will miss mother! Still, I struggle on, praying and trusting that we may all be together some day."

"I sincerely hope you will," I answered, deeply touched by her confidence and emotion.

"Ah, yes," she replied; "but two years is a long time. However, in two years Robbie takes his pension, and we come home for good. And now, my dear child, tell me your troubles—chiefly imaginary, I should say. Come, confide your perplexities to me as if you were my own Milly, and let me see if I can help you. You have no mother, I know."

"No; she died when I was quite a little thing," I answered. "I cannot even remember her. My uncle, Mr. Beverly, adopted me, and treated me as one of his own children: he had three. My aunt, too, was very good to me. The only one to whom I was unwelcome was Emma, the nurse. You see, I was not a Beverly."

"No," she replied, with a faint smile; "*only* a Ferrars. Well, go on."

"I must confess that I had a happy childhood. Linda and Julia are older, but Tom and I are the same age, and we were inseparable companions. We played cricket

and hockey, and fished, and ran with the beagles; indeed, I ran wild until I was fifteen, and then it suddenly occurred to uncle to send me to school."

"Yes, and quite time too," remarked my listener, with emphasis.

"I went to Munich, and there I remained five years —not because Aunt Lucy wished to banish me, but because my uncle died. That was my first grief. His affairs were in dreadful confusion. He had been trustee for some one who turned out badly, and so he was obliged to make up a large sum; and as he had never saved a penny, he was ruined."

"Ah, yes, I remember hearing about it," said Mrs. Evans; "and how all the Beverly heirlooms were sold in order to pay that unjust debt."

"I could not return home for want of money, and so I gave lessons in English in exchange for my education; and at last, a year ago, Aunt Lucy sent for me, and I went back to Beverly."

"How glad you must have been!"

"I was delighted indeed; but my joy was soon damped. I found everything painfully changed, and the dear old house stripped of pictures, books, and furniture. It looked so cold, so empty, and so poor."

Mrs. Evans nodded sympathetically.

"Aunt Lucy was a faded, bent old lady; Linda had become a hard, bustling working woman; Julia indifferent to any thing or any one but her art and painting; and all three were struggling from morning till night to make both ends meet, and to keep up appearances."

"A most painful and difficult task," testified my listener.

"They denied themselves fire, light, and even food,"

I resumed. "And imagine a great, healthy, useless girl like me added to the household!"

"Not useless, surely, my dear," objected Mrs. Evans.

"Yes; I could dust, and darn, and garden, and go messages, but I could not earn money. My music and German were wasted, for Aunt Lucy would not hear of my giving lessons in the neighbourhood."

"Proud!" ejaculated my companion.

"Yes, most painfully proud. We subscribed as formerly to the local charities, had an 'At Home' day, punctiliously returned visits, held up our heads—and pinched. Linda, the housekeeper and manager, was most anxious for her mother to sell the manor and move to a flat in London, where she could more easily dispose of her art embroideries, and Julia her paintings—portraits were her line. The manor was a beautiful old Queen-Anne house of the type most in request. If they would only get rid of the manor—and of me! I was conscious—though it was never put into plain words—that I was a dreadful encumbrance, a sort of white elephant; and then, quite unexpectedly, I became engaged."

"Come, now, this is getting interesting," said Mrs. Evans, edging a little closer; "and I am a capital confidante. Please tell me all about it."

"I am afraid you will be sadly disappointed; it is not a thrilling and romantic tale."

"But won't you allow me to judge?" she urged persuasively.

"Very well," I assented, with a sigh. "You must know that in former days we were exceedingly intimate with a family called Thorold. They lived a mile at the other side of Beverly village. The family consisted of Mrs.

Thorold, a widow, and several girls and boys. I used to romp with the younger boys—Tom's playmates and mine—and Walter and I were rather chums. I was barely fifteen and he one-and-twenty when he went to India. I have never seen him since, and yet I am going out to marry him!" I paused, and added, half under my breath, "Am I not rash?"

"I cannot say, my dear, until you tell me more details. It certainly sounds enterprising. Oh, here comes the steward with five-o'clock tea, and the two little Zenana ladies. I invited them. They seem so wretchedly forlorn, never having been a voyage. Now, I am an old hand, though an indifferent sailor. You won't mind them?"

"Mind! Not at all," I replied. "Why should I?"

"They are such shy, good little creatures; we will try and cheer them up. After tea you must not run away, but settle down and tell me the whole of your story from beginning to end. Come, is that a promise?"

And she looked at me with such an expression of kindly sympathy, that I stammered out a feeble assent.

CHAPTER II

A LEAP IN THE DARK

In spite of my acquiescence, several days elapsed before I redeemed my promise to Mrs. Evans and we resumed our conversation. She knew many of the passengers, and her company appeared to be in continual request. Now, it was the wife of some high official who had been in the same station years previously; again, it was a bearded forest officer, or a young subaltern she had known as an infant, or even an obsequious ayah, who claimed her notice.

Our talk was thus postponed—indefinitely, I hoped. For now that we sailed the blue Mediterranean under sunny skies, my spirits had shaken off grey thoughts and depression. I no longer felt a forlorn and friendless orphan, thankful to pour my troubles into a kind sympathetic ear that lent itself to my misgivings. No; on the contrary, I bitterly repented of my foolish and impulsive outburst, and sincerely trusted that my listener had forgotten it. But I was soon undeceived. One afternoon, just before dusk, Mrs. Evans waylaid me in the saloon, and said as she took my arm—

"I have found a delightful corner for a solitude *à deux*. It is too cold to go on deck, too dark to read, so please

come and let me hear the rest of your story; when we left off, it was 'to be continued in our next,' you remember."

"But really, Mrs. Evans, on second thoughts," I faltered, "I won't inflict it upon you; it is too bad to bother you with my foolish confidences. You have so many friends, and I am only a stranger, and—and——"

"And nonsense!" she interrupted. "In the first place, you are not a stranger. I knew your father, Lancelot Ferrars—for the Ferrars belong to my part of the world. I remember, when I was a girl, all the fuss there was about his marriage."

"I believe his people were angry, and the Beverlys were furious; but I never could understand what it was all about. The Beverlys are an old family."

"It had nothing to do with family, but your father was engaged to his cousin, Lady Elizabeth Tregar—not a love-match on his side. She was high-shouldered and awkward, with a plain face and a tongue like a razor. She was older than he. But she had set her heart on handsome Lancelot Ferrars, and a marriage was arranged."

"Oh, was it?" I ejaculated.

"Yes, your father had no profession; he was a second son, and rather delicate; but Lady Elizabeth was immensely rich."

"And what happened?" I inquired.

"He went to Madeira for the winter, and there made the acquaintance of Miss Beverly, a pretty girl, who was visiting friends. She was musical, and sang deliciously; she was also young, animated, fascinating, and penniless. Lancelot Ferrars fell madly in love with her. He broke

off his engagement, and they were married. You see, I am telling you a story, instead of listening to yours," she added playfully.

"But how interesting to *me!* Do go on," I urged.

"This marriage, of course, infuriated his relations," she resumed. "They could not have been more shocked if he had committed forgery, or even murder. He had withdrawn his word, he had disgraced his name, and married a pretty pauper instead of a great heiress; so they washed their hands of him with one consent. He died a couple of years later, when you were a mere infant."

"I have never heard much of my father; do please tell me what he was like," I asked eagerly.

"Tall and fair, with dreamy blue eyes, and a way of saying amusing things without a smile. He was considered clever, and had taken honours. Now you must confess that I am no stranger, am I? I knew all about you long before we ever met."

"You did indeed," I acknowledged; "more than I did myself."

"And as for confidences," she continued, "people on board ship impart their affairs to utter strangers after a fashion that would seem impossible on land. It may be something in the sea-air. They blow off steam about their connections, and air their pet vanities and private grievances, in a manner that entertains their listeners, and possibly relieves them. They are aware that they will never come across the confidant again; no one is so soon forgotten as a fellow-passenger. But you"—laying her hand on mine—"are different. You are the daughter of an old—neighbour. If I said admirer, you

would not believe me, I am such an utter wreck. Come! I have listened to many a tale; I have been of some use; and I shall be so glad to help you."

"It is very good of you to be interested," I stammered.

"My dear, don't you know that every woman is interested in a love-story?"

"But I am afraid that mine is *not* a love-story," I replied, shaking my head. "However, you shall judge for yourself. I have known Watty as long as I can remember. I recollect when he went to school. I remember his first watch, his first tail coat. We went fishing with him—Tom and I—and followed the beagles together; and we played hockey on the ice, or hunted for pheasants' eggs, according to the season; and it was always Watty, Pam, and Tom. You see, I was so much younger than the girls—I always herded with uncle and the boys."

"Yes, I see; and when Watty was one-and-twenty, and went away to India, were you heart-broken?"

"Not at all," I answered. "Just ordinarily sorry. I cried twice as much when my fox-terrier died; but Walter gave me his white rabbit, and I gave him a blue bead ring."

"And a kiss?" suggested Mrs. Evans, with a smile.

"Oh no! I never thought of him in that way—only as a chum; indeed, he was as much Tom's chum as mine."

"Yes?" she assented rather doubtfully.

"Then, when I came home from Germany as a grown-up girl, and revisited old friends, Mrs. Thorold, Watty's mother, noticed me a good deal. The first Sunday I was in church, I remember she stared at me so fixedly that

I felt quite uncomfortable. Whenever I looked up I always met her eyes. She has since told me that she took a fancy to me on the spot."

"And was it mutual?"

"I don't know; well, no," I owned; "my cousins were always abusing her. They said she was an odious, underhand, scheming woman, who had married off her daughters, put her sons out in the world, and never did anything without a motive. But then, I believe their troubles had soured them."

"Very possibly," agreed Mrs. Evans dryly.

"And Linda said horrible things of old friends and other girls; and the Thorolds had gone up, and the Beverlys gone down. At any rate, they are quite fond of Mrs. Thorold *now*."

"Oh, what a satisfaction for Mrs. Thorold!" said my listener sarcastically.

"She, they admitted, had no possible motive in being kind to me, for I had no social position, no interests, and no money. Her daughters were married, and she frequently asked me over to spend a day at the Court, and I took my work—art embroidery—and went. I helped her with her knitting, and arranged flowers and answered notes. She was continually talking about her children, especially of Walter, her favourite son. She used to give me little messages from him, and read me choice bits of his letters. Then he wrote me a line for my birthday, and somehow our correspondence began and grew like a snowball."

"Ah!" exclaimed my companion expressively, "that's the *rôle* of love-letters."

But I wrote just as I would to Tom, who was in South

Africa, and I shall never forget my surprise when, one evening as I was strolling down the avenue, Mrs. Thorold told me that Watty had seen my photograph in a hockey group, and had fallen desperately in love with me. My breath was literally taken away; I felt almost hysterical, and could do nothing but scream with laughter. At last I assured his mother that it was merely a joke on his part; but she was serious, and even indignant. The next morning Mrs. Thorold came early and asked to see Aunt Lucy alone, and they remained closeted together in solemn conclave for an hour, and at dinner that day I noticed that Aunt Lucy looked at me frequently, as if she saw something odd about me."

"The two old ladies had talked it over and were agreed? What was the next step?" inquired Mrs. Evans.

"There was no next step, but somehow it began to be whispered that there was an old understanding between Watty Thorold and myself, a boy-and-girl attachment. I tried hard to silence it, but it was everywhere—in the air, in Mrs. Thorold's manner, in my cousins' eyes. They became much more affectionate."

"And then?" said Mrs. Evans, sinking her voice to a half-whisper.

"Then I received a letter from Walter—oh, such a beautiful letter!—asking me to be his wife."

"And what did you say, my dear?"

"Nothing whatever, but other people said a great deal. They seemed to think it was an extraordinary chance for me—most wonderful good luck. There were such hordes of girls and old maids in the neighbourhood, and the race of eligible bachelors was extinct. Aunt Lucy

did not press the subject, but Linda was eloquently urgent; and Mrs. Thorold came over one day and talked for an hour, holding my hand all the time, and never taking her eyes from my face. I believe she hypnotized me with her piercing eyes and her low clear voice, speaking only for my good. Then Emma, the nurse, stole into my room one night, and laid the matter plainly before me. She was a religious woman, and she had made my future the subject of prayer; here was her answer!"

"My poor child!" ejaculated Mrs. Evans; "how you were beset on all sides!"

"It seemed that Aunt Lucy had received an excellent offer for the Manor—in short, a fancy price. She had heard of a nice flat with three bedrooms and a studio, but there was no room for more than the family. So I was to marry Walter because my aunt's flat was short of a room."

"How ridiculous!"

"Yes, to you," I returned; "but there was nothing comic about this grey-haired woman who was turning me out of the domestic nest. I was an encumbrance, a cuckoo, and she always made me realize it."

"Odious old creature!" cried Mrs. Evans. "I detest these ancient retainers—I mean, other people's ancient retainers."

"I felt as if Linda, Emma, Mrs. Thorold, and the solid force of public opinion were pushing me over the edge of a precipice, and I was clinging on frantically with both hands."

"Yes, and so you were."

"But I was sentimental—in fact," I faltered, "I *am* sentimental. I was flattered. I should have a home—my

own, own home; and I had always longed to see India. It was true that Watty was only a tea-planter's assistant, and that our career would be the reverse of brilliant; but then, I had never been accustomed to balls and amusements. I was fond of outdoor pursuits; I was young and strong. Watty was a good son—a good son makes a good husband—and I had known him all my life."

"Yes; and on the other hand?" asked Mrs. Evans softly.

"Well, on the other hand, not one whisper of love or shadow of love-making had ever passed between us. We had not met for nearly six years. It was a cold-blooded, heartless proceeding to cross the world in order to become the wife of a man to whom I was almost a stranger—who, were we to meet unexpectedly, would probably pass me in the street; for I had grown three inches, I had put my hair up, since we last met. There I shivered on the brink; on mail day, half inclined to say 'yes'—for his letters were delightful—other days, firmly determined to say 'no.' At last I received Watty's photograph, and I'm afraid you will despise me when I tell you that it turned the scale; in other words, I ceased to cling to the precipice. I let go; I fell in love with his face, and I said 'yes.'"

"My dear, what a leap in the dark!" exclaimed Mrs. Evans. "Would you mind allowing me to see this important photograph, for I am a firm believer in physiognomy?"

"It is in my cabin," I answered, "and I will show it to you to-morrow with pleasure,—but there is no light now."

"By the time you have found it, kissed it, and brought

it here, I shall have light," she responded. "Go now, my dear, and humour me, for I feel as if I could not rest until I have seen this man's picture."

I rose at once—the electric light was being turned on—and went over to our cabin, where I soon unearthed my treasure in its blue morocco case. Then I came back and joined Mrs. Evans, who was seated at a table close to a lamp. Her lips were slightly parted, and her eyes shone with anticipation, as she held out her hand for the photograph.

CHAPTER III

THE PHOTOGRAPH

WITHOUT a word, I solemnly placed the morocco case in Mrs. Evans's outstretched hand, and sat down to await her verdict—with some suspense and a certain amount of triumphant expectancy, for it was a fine, strong, noble face which had stormed my heart and conquered all misgivings.

My chaperon contemplated the portrait for a long time, and then looked over at me with a grave expression in her dark eyes.

"Shall I tell you what I think?" she asked.

I nodded my head impatiently. Had I not been waiting for her opinion for five minutes by the clock?

"I think you have drawn a great prize in life's lottery. You are one of fortune's favourites."

I leant forward eagerly in order to listen to this word-music.

"Yes"—rapping the cardboard with her forefinger—"this man, to judge by his face, is conscientious, hard-working, and honourable. He is constant, though not very tender; his love is to be relied on."

Here I believe I drew a long breath of relief, and she continued, now glancing at me and then at Walter—

"He is fastidious, reticent, but open and frank with

those he loves. He is capable of a deep attachment, but critical and not easily moved to admiration. He is ambitious and strong willed. He has brains. Altogether, a most interesting face;" and she set it up against her work-basket. "And, oh yes," she added, with a laugh, "last, but not least, he is handsome."

At all this praise I felt myself blushing with pleasure, and experiencing some of the importance and satisfaction of being engaged.

"Your friend, his mother, must have written most glowing accounts of you," continued Mrs. Evans, "for he"—pointing to the photograph—"is not a man to take a leap in the dark."

"No; Watty was always rather cautious," I admitted; "but he was never the least bit critical."

"Possibly not, but he has changed in the six years; after one-and-twenty a boy becomes a man. He looks old for his age."

"Yes," I assented; "he always did. He has altered a good deal, and—and so have I; I hope I shall not disappoint him."

"No," she answered, considering me meditatively. "I don't think you will, my dear. I believe you will suit. Now, shall I tell you your character?"

"Yes, please do, both bad and good."

"You have tenderness and romance of feeling under a somewhat cold exterior. You can be most incautious, and yet extremely reserved. You are abrupt, sensitive, truthful, tenacious. You have a high temper—or shall I call it spirit? You hate being put upon, or being under an obligation. You have a kind heart; old people and dumb animals are fond of you."

"Well, is that all?" I inquired. "I think you have read my face correctly. I know I am abrupt, and I do hate being under an obligation. I cannot gush——"

"Oh, not quite all," she interrupted. "For a girl of your age, you have extraordinary self-command. I noticed it in the cabin, when the American girl sat on your hat, and when you caught your finger in the hinge."

"I was at school abroad, and a poor relation at home," I briefly rejoined.

"Well, it is a valuable trait, and I dare say that, and the Ferrars' pride, will stand by you. No, I don't think Mr. Thorold will be disappointed."

"It is very kind of you to say so, but when I read his letters I feel so miserably inferior. My intellect is far beneath his standard; I am not clever, except with my fingers."

"With his head and your hands, I believe you will manage to keep the pot boiling. What are your fingers good for?"

"Sewing, embroidery, music; I can play the piano and guitar; at a pinch, I can cook."

"My child, you will be a domestic treasure! No man is indifferent to his dinner, though your *fiancé* is no gourmand."

I recalled Watty's passion for jam-roll and plum-cake in days of yore, and how he gobbled up my share of roast chestnuts as well as his own.

Whilst we were talking, a number of people had entered the saloon, and several passed by our retreat.

"Good land! who is this?" suddenly inquired a voice behind me; and a little white-faced American pointed at Walter's photograph. "May I look?" and without waiting for an answer, she snatched up the frame.

Miss Hatty P. Schulyer, of New York City, who occupied the top berth in our cabin, was a bright original young lady, *en route* for Japan, and a highly popular person.

"My! he is a real star!" she remarked at last. "Now, I do wonder what made him fancy you?"

"Why do you wonder?" I rejoined. "Why should he not fancy me?"

"Because you are so simple and unworldly and meek, —though, I admit, pretty. I should say you have no enterprise, or dash, or smartness. Now"—rapping the frame with her *pince-nez*—"he is an ambitious fellow, and bound to go ahead; clever, bold, and cool-headed. From his lips, I should say he had no great call for a sweetheart or a wife yet; and I tell you this square to your face—he is more a man to suit *me* than you."

"What nonsense!" I exclaimed derisively.

"No; it is horse-sense, for I am enormously rich, and he is enormously ambitious."

"You are wrong," I retorted. "He has not a scrap of ambition about him. When he was plucked for the army he was rather glad."

"What, that man?" she screamed, suddenly sitting down beside me. "What is he now?"

"A tea-planter's assistant."

"Scotland! And I thought he was first secretary to the viceroy at the least. Well, Hatty Schulyer, you are a duffer, and go straight to the bottom of the class for once. Of course, I knew you were going out to be married, Miss Ferrars."

"How did you guess that?"

"Well, you see, I am not just a born fool, and I did not spend a week studying 'P.M.T.' on your cabin box for nothing."

At this moment Mrs. Blasson, the tenant of berth number four, accompanied by much swishing of silk and an overpowering perfume of magnolia, approached, and stood directly behind us. She was dressed for dinner in a glittering black gown, and wore a string of pearls round her neck.

"What are you two talking about?" she languidly inquired. "And who is the man?" Then she leaned over and took up the photograph. There was a long expressive pause, and at last she spoke.

"Mr. Thorold, by all that's extraordinary! Your property?" and she nodded carelessly at Mrs. Evans.

"No," rejoined that lady. "He belongs to Miss Ferrars in every sense of the word."

"To you, Miss Ferrars?" she repeated, in a tone of incredulity that was far from flattering. Then she stood for a moment with the case in her hand, and looked me up and down. Unquestionably my attractions were a sealed book. Finally, she exclaimed—

"I must confess that you amaze me. I had no idea that he was engaged to be married. Has he known you long?"

"Since I was five years old."

"Indeed! what a fortunate man!" she sneered. "A boy-and-girl attachment, of course—begun over a Noah's ark, and cemented by bread-and-jam and nursery teas."

I made no reply, but extended my hand to reclaim my property.

"Well," she continued, as she restored it, "so the

secret is out! I always suspected that he had something up his sleeve, he was so uncompanionable and *difficile*. And at last his praiseworthy loyalty is about to be rewarded! I am glad I have had an opportunity of making Miss Ferrars' acquaintance;" and she stared at me superciliously, then threw a quick little nod to be distributed among us, and walked off.

"Dear me, dear me! what a commotion your *fiancé* has created!" exclaimed Hatty, with a sly smile. "Do put him away at once, in case he may have other lady friends around. Give him to me"—holding out her hand—"and I'll lock him up safely for the rest of the voyage."

CHAPTER IV

THE WELCOME

I WAS now seeing life and "society" on a large scale for the first time, and it was all so new and strange to me. Most of our fellow-passengers were old acquaintances, or had mutual friends; and I listened to people talking glibly of places I did not even know on the map, and noticed how the glamour of the East had thrown her spell over many who appeared glad to return and resume their work, their sport, their place in social life, and were full of the horrors of an English winter. There were "sets," of course, among a throng of nearly three hundred passengers. There was the gay set, who danced energetically, and got up concerts and theatricals. There was the cultured set, who talked Maeterlinck and Nietzsche; the Wagnerites, the Ibsenites, and the Exclusives.

We saw but little of Mrs. Blasson. She acted and dressed splendidly, and flirted steadily; was always the last to rise and the last to retire. She generally ignored Mrs. Evans and Miss Hatty, but occasionally condescended to address me, and afterwards I invariably felt miserably insignificant, or as if I had had my ears most soundly boxed. Why did she dislike me?—for she *did* detest me—I read it in her eyes; and I had observed her telling

a story, and glancing over in my direction with smiles of derision. Somehow, it had leaked out that I was both musical and good-natured, and I was therefore requisitioned to play accompaniments to all sorts and conditions of voices. I assisted at entertainments, and what with practising for concerts, sewing for the Zenana ladies, and reading aloud to Mrs. Evans—whose eloquent eyes were weak—my time was fully occupied. But I kept my ears and eyes open. This voyage was an education. I felt as if I had lifted my head over the edge of a wall, and peeped at the great round world. I gathered impressions as I passed. For instance, of Malta—sweet roses, narrow steep streets, Knight Templars, and white poodles; of Port Said—*cafés chantants* and coal; of the weird Desert illumined by electric light, and a great ship surrounded by an ocean of sand. Then, the Red Sea was so much wider than the map had led me to expect, and here and there I descried a melancholy mast or funnel cast away among its formidable islands. During our voyage I was generously supplied with a good deal of practical advice by Miss Hatty P. Schulyer. I esteemed her well-meant benevolence, and accepted it with thanks. Until she had heard me playing at the concerts and speaking fluent German to a steward, I believe Miss Hatty looked upon me with commiseration. Since then, she had coolly announced, in her most matter-of-fact style—

"I honestly think you are a clever, brainy girl, Pamela Ferrars, and I used to be afraid you were a poor simpleton with a pretty face. But in worldly wisdom you are a mere babe."

"Why so?" I inquired combatively.

"Well, for instance, when old Goldchild offered to give

you a lovely fan and a box of French bon-bons at Port Said, you refused with virtuous indignation."

"Of course! And what would you have done?" I demanded.

"Accepted with effusion, and eaten the candies; it would have pleased him, and done you no harm. You will never see him again after Bombay, and you would have been a box of sweeties and a lovely fan to the good. Rich old men were invented for making presents."

"Not to strangers," I retorted. "And just think——"

"No, no; I hate thinking," she protested. "When I'm an old woman, I'll sit by the fire and muse. Now I'm young, I prefer to live life rather than discuss it. Shall I tell you something, Pamela Ferrars?"

"Yes, if it is something pleasant."

"You don't make half enough of your appearance; I mention this strictly in your own interests. For instance, look at your hair—such quantities, such a rich golden brown! You twist it up as if you were ashamed of it."

"And so I am," I rejoined promptly. "It is the colour of the new tint, and every one thinks it is dyed."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" she cried. "And then, why in the name of patience do you affect these ugly old greys and browns? And the sleeves of that blouse are just ridiculous! Is this the outfit, or are you wearing your old clothes? —made in Germany, I guess."

"You guess correctly. They do well enough for travelling."

"Not at all. Such an exploded idea! You should put your best foot foremost—on board ship, especially."

"And what about the Bay, when we could not even stand?"

"Oh, the Bay be—calmed! Why make a fright of yourself? If you only had your hair well dressed, and some nice stylish frocks, you'd cut out every woman on board the *Smyrna*—and that's as sure as I'm talking to you; I heard a man say so."

"I don't want to cut out any one; and you will be relieved to hear that I'm going to endow the stewardess with my old tweed."

"She'll chuck it overboard," jeered Hatty.

"I have some very pretty dresses in my heavy baggage." They had cost a great deal of time and consideration and money. My outfit and passage money had swallowed up all my income—forty pounds—for the next three years.

"My! I should like to see them," she exclaimed. "Seeing is believing."

"I am afraid they would not seem smart to you, who pay two hundred dollars for a tailor-made—it sounds wickedly extravagant — and they are not so elegant as some of Mrs. Blasson's frocks; but they are sufficiently fashionable for a tea-plantation."

"I'd love to have a look at them; first impressions mean so much. Do promise me, when you arrive among these new people, to rout out and wear one of your pet evening gowns; and then you will see how they will fall down and come crawling to your feet to worship Pamela the Patrician."

"They are not at all likely to do any such thing; probably they will think me Pamela the infliction." Mrs. Hassall's letter to Mrs. Thorold had been exceedingly business-like and definite respecting the length of my visit. One week, she expressly stated—and the *one* was underlined.

"Now, pray sit down," continued Miss Schulyer, "and let me do your hair. If I had this"—seizing and unwinding a coil—"I declare I'd set up for a beauty at once."

"But don't you set up for that *without* my hair?" I asked sedately.

"Now, for goodness' sake, don't try to be sarcastic, Pamela Ferrars; it is not your style. Leave all that to Madame Blasson. We won't have her coming in, thank goodness; she adorned half an hour ago."

"I wonder why she always dresses first?"

"Bless your dear little simple heart! because Captain Tarrant dresses early too. Oh, she's a horrid sly creature; I cannot endure her."

"Why not? She never gives you snubs."

"No; she had better not try; and, besides, she uses my Florida water and cucumber wash and hair-nets. It would never do to fight with *me*. I see through her, though; I'm sharper than you are."

"That's only your version," I retorted. "You may be 'cute, but I should not call you penetrating."

"Do you remember how sick I was in the Bay?" resumed Hatty imperturbably. "That Bay will never see *me* again. You were a dear good Samaritan, and mighty kind to me; your very face cheered me. Well, one night the stewardess brought me a plate of biscuits which I had not ordered. I turned them over, thinking to nibble one, and discovered a nice little note."

"A note!" I exclaimed. "How extraordinary!"

"The biscuits were for Mrs. Blasson, and not for me at all. And every night whilst the gale lasted she had biscuits the last thing at night—biscuits and something sweet."

"You mean a note; but it may have been from a lady," I suggested.

"Pamela Ferrars, I declare you are just too silly for anything; I really don't see how you are going to get through this wicked world. Mrs. Blasson has a fine figure, but she has an evil face."

"But it's handsome," I protested.

"Maybe; but her behaviour is ugly. Where is her husband?"

"She is a widow. Did you not know?"

"Of course I know—a grass widow."

"Her husband is dead—he died in India two years ago; and she is coming out to stay with friends and to look at his grave."

"To look for his successor, you mean. How did you discover this?"

"I heard Mrs. Dawkins telling Mrs. Evans. Mrs. Dawkins is the stout old lady who talks of 'khansamahs' and 'kits;' Mrs. Blasson's friends live near her."

"I hope she won't live near you, Pam. I've a sort of notion she grudges you your *fiancé*, and she goes out of her way to be ugly to you."

"Yes, and is thoroughly successful."

"But why do you stand it?" demanded Hatty impatiently. "Even a worm will turn."

"Not in a four-berth cabin!—and thank you so much for the compliment about the worm. Supposing we quarrelled, how unpleasant it would be for you!—and in a few days we shall part for ever and for evermore."

"I shan't mope if I never see her again; but you and I will only say *au revoir*. I've got your address, and when I come back from Japan I'll stay in Calcutta, and

run up and see you on your tea estate, and taste your tea and inspect your tea-planter."

"And you will be heartily welcome."

"Only think, in less than a month you will be Mrs. Thorold! Of course he will meet you; he is probably already sitting on the Bund in Bombay, with a telescope to his eye, watching for his lady love."

"That I cannot say; but I hope he will be there when I arrive."

"How long is it since you parted 'in silence and tears'?" she inquired.

"Nearly six years; but I assure you that we were both dry-eyed."

"Let me see, I'm doing a little sum; you were fifteen, say, and wore a pigtail, when last he saw you, Pamela Ferrars?"

"No; it was a great tawny mane, Hatty Schulyer."

"It amounts to much the same thing; and permit me to tell you that it is a risky business to marry a man you have had out of your sight for years and years—men change."

"Yes—you are running that hair-pin into my head!—and so do women."

"I'm aware of it; but a man knocks about, and has the corners chipped off him. Mr. Thorold looks strong and manly, but I believe it was his handsome face that lured you out. Now, I've one more last piece of advice to offer you—don't marry him unless he is up to the sample, and unless you love him. What is a letter?—mere paper. What is a photograph?—only cardboard. Wait a bit, and study him."

"I shall not have time," I answered. "I'm going up

country at once, and we are to be married from the house of his cousin in about a week."

"A week is too short a time to make up for six years, and a man can easily be on his best behaviour for seven days. Don't be hasty. You are so amiable and pliable, doing what every one wishes. Do learn, as Ibsen says, to 'realize yourself.' Now, look at your hair—a woman's glory!—is it not well dressed? It makes such a difference in your appearance. Remember, you must always wear it in this fashion—it will remind you of Hatty Schulyer—till we meet again. There is the dinner-bell!—I shall be late."

Shortly after this conversation, I awoke one morning early to find that we were swinging at anchor in Bombay Harbour. As my companions were still sound asleep, I dressed noiselessly, and hurried up on deck. There were the wide bay, the islands, the palms, the long rows of white buildings, and the motley collection of shipping and boats which Mrs. Evans had described. Over all there lay a soft golden haze; the glamour of the East had already touched me. Here was India! The mere name thrilled my imagination. Viewed from the sea, it appeared to be a land of promise, romance, and enchantment. I leant my elbows on the rail and gazed, wondering wistfully, Should I be happy there?

I had the deck almost to myself; but by the time the great clock on shore chimed eight, the ship was all alive and full of the bustle of departure. The quarantine officer had come and gone; our letters had arrived—they were laid out on a table in the saloon, and two were for me. Of these, one was from Walter. I tore it open as soon as I got out of the crowd. The writing was shaky

—alarmingly so. No, he had not been able to manage to get away; he had had a bad go of fever, but hoped to be at Bareda as soon as I arrived there. His cousin, Tizzie Hassall, was longing to receive me. The other note was a mere line from Linda, enclosing a small account which had been overlooked. This had travelled *viâ* Brindisi, and had consequently reached Bombay before me; and so, instead of being welcomed by Walter Thorold, I was met by a little bill!

CHAPTER V

DISAPPOINTMENT

"WHERE is he?—has he come?" inquired Mrs. Evans, laying her hand on my shoulder. "I have kept well in the background, my dear, and have been getting my belongings together. Now you must introduce me, if you please."

"I would with pleasure," I replied, struggling hard to seem unconcerned, "but I have had a letter to say that Walter has had fever, and cannot travel, but will meet me at Bareda."

"Ah, those tea estates are often feverish," she remarked, "but it's nothing to be alarmed about. Then, you and I will be together as far as Basaule Junction. I am sorry I am not going the whole way; but you will only have about ten hours alone."

How my heart sank at the prospect!

"Our train starts at four," she continued, "and we shall just have time to have tiffin comfortably at Watson's. Come, now, keep up your spirits."

Our fellow-passengers were collecting their luggage, and making ready for prompt departure. I observed Mrs. Blasson in a smart travelling-costume and a becoming hat,

the centre of a lively group. She glanced at me repeatedly, and I noticed her eyes roving around in search of some one else. She made no attempt to bid me good-bye; but Hatty P. Schulyer, who had been met by joyful friends, followed me down to our cabin, and kissed me, gave me a little present of a "lucky" cat's-eye brooch set in brilliants, and made me promise to write to her.

The Zenana ladies also took leave of me kindly, and hoped that we might meet again; and so we all parted on the Apollo Bund, and dispersed to go our different ways. Mrs. Evans and I got into a little victoria drawn by a long-tailed Arab, and drove about Bombay. What a gay bustling city! What vivid colours, and glowing sunshine! Life seemed so much brighter here than in Clayshire.

By four o'clock we were steaming out of the station towards Parel, passing low-lying, picturesque villages, bazaars, clumps of palms, and inlets of the sea. It was moonlight when we began to ascend the great Bhor Ghaut. We sat at the window, staring down upon those dark, mysterious precipices; and as time went on, we talked —talked till late—face to face in the silver moonlight, which was almost as bright as day.

"I believe I must have come under your father's fascination unawares," said Mrs. Evans, "though I never lost my heart to him. Still, he had a haunting personality, and I feel drawn to his girl. You are like him in a way, and I cannot bear to think of you alone and friendless in this immense strange country—alone, except for young Thorold. Oh, how much depends on him, dear—all your young life! May he deserve your trust; but if I am a judge of faces, he is a good man."

"Yes, I hope so—I think so," I faltered, with a sustaining remembrance of his letters.

"For a friendless girl, I can imagine no place more awful than this vast country. In England she has resources; she can go into an office, become a typewriter, or governess, or paint, or write. Here there are no openings. She must just drift and drift, till she comes to want—or worse. And for a pretty girl, what temptations!"

"Oh, Mrs. Evans," I protested, "what a Cassandra you are!"

"No, no, my dear; but the society of the East fluctuates: it is here to-day, gone to-morrow; no one has a settled home."

"But I shall be settled," I answered emphatically. "Watty has sent me a photograph of our bungalow; it is lovely—all covered with roses, and standing above the tea-gardens. I shall have a home."

"Yes, dear, please God, and an ideal haven. You are not the sort of girl to be flighty and flirting and foolish if susceptible young planters come and burn incense to your pretty face. Be good, use your influence for the best, and never go against your conscience—conscience is the voice of God."

"Yes, I believe that," I whispered.

"May you be truly content, and share your happiness with others! You will write to me, won't you?"

"Of course; I shall be only too glad. You will be my only correspondent."

"And if—now, please do not be offended—by the hundredth part of a chance your Walter is *not* what you believed him to be, if you feel honestly that you do not love him, do not be hurried into a marriage. Wait;

come to me. Will you promise?"—and she took my hand in hers.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Evans, I will," I replied, with a mental repudiation of the "hundredth part of a chance."

"We are quiet humdrum people, you know, but I am sure you would like Robbie, and feel yourself at home; and you could be our deputy daughter until you made your mind up or arranged your plans."

"How kind you are! how good you have been to me!" I raised her hand and kissed it fervently.

The next morning, I was alone.

* * * * *

All day long I travelled in a leisurely, comfortable manner; I had the carriage entirely to myself, and sat at the window gravely studying India—the mud-walled villages, the creaking well-wheels, the great plains, the flocks and herds, the odd birds, the wide shrunken rivers, and the neat little railway stations, their platforms crammed with a motley crowd. I thought of Walter with misgivings—I was so simple and countrified. Would he be dreadfully disappointed? He had changed and improved far more than I had. I was tall and slim, my hair was pretty, and my complexion was accounted brilliant: indeed, Mrs. Blasson had asked me straight out if it was real; and when I protested indignantly, she said, "Well, it is no matter; unless you go to the hills at once, it won't stand six months. In a year, it will be a mere memory. Make the most of it while it lasts."

I stood up and dispassionately surveyed my face in the carriage mirror. It was pale enough now; my eyes looked

preternaturally large—and frightened. Oh, and I *was* frightened! In half an hour's time, Walter and I would be face to face—I had carefully studied the railway guide. When we had passed the last station before Bareda, I found myself trembling with a palsy of self-distrust.

I had taken immense pains with my hair. I had unpacked, and put on a really pretty hat. I had brushed and dusted my dress. I wore the cat's-eye brooch for luck. What more could I do?

As the train began to rumble over roads and level crossings, to slow down, my heart beat in jerks. I felt so nervous, so utterly forlorn, that I was half inclined to crawl under the seat. Yet, why should I fear Walter now? I had never been the least afraid of him before. But a gawky, loose-limbed youth in flannels and high spirits was different from the young man who had been his own master for years, and who was expecting great things of me as his sweetheart and wife.

As we glided and jolted into a big station, I sat back—my little parcels neatly arranged, my rugs strapped. Then I glanced out furtively, but I saw no one the least like Walter. Was he very ill? What did it mean? I waited in motionless anguish for what seemed at least half an hour; then the door slowly opened, and a gorgeous native in blue and scarlet, with great brass badges, looked in and salaamed:

"Miss Sahib, for Hassall Mem Sahib?"

I nodded in reply. He beckoned to me to alight, and, when I had done so, placed a note in my hand. Was I always to be met by mere notes? I tore it open, whilst the chuprassi emptied my carriage. It was written on a tiny sheet of paper, and said—

"DEAR MISS FERRARS,

"*Do* excuse my not coming to the station, but I found that I had an important engagement which I could not get out of. The bearer will look after you; he is my right hand.

"Yours truly,

"E. HASSALL."

Well, there was nothing for it but to point out my luggage, and to place myself and belongings in the care of Mrs. Hassall's right hand. In a wonderfully short time he had collected my boxes, and we were rattling away in a conveyance drawn by two ponies, and called a gharri. So now I was actually launched at last! Thanks to the steamer, rail, and this ramshackle vehicle, I should soon be at my journey's end.

We drove along through what gave me the impression of a great park intersected with broad white roads, with here and there a thatched house blinking from a deep verandah. I saw no evidence of a town or even a bazaar, yet this was Busabad cantonment. Once we had cleared the station, we passed many people driving in carriages and dog-carts. Their lights flashed by like enormous yellow eyes.

It appeared a very tedious time until we turned into a gate, thundered up a drive, and came to a full stop under the porch of a long low house—an impressive Eastern residence. The verandah was matted, and furnished with chairs, screens, and a quantity of palms, all lit up by pretty coloured lamps.

A bearded servant sauntered down the steps and salaamed to me, and a wiry little woman with strange

earrings and nose-rings accosted me in broken English, took charge of my dressing-bag, and preceded me into the bungalow. First of all, we went into a passage; passed a lofty dining-room, where the table was laid with a profusion of flowers and silver; finally into a bedroom, which displayed a vast expanse of matting, a few chairs, and a small mosquito-net veiled cot.

"Mem sahib gone club gur, Miss Sahib," explained my attendant, setting down my bag. "Big Tamasha, but soon—soon coming."

The ayah's eyes were apologetic. Then she went out and gave some direction in shrill Hindostani, and my boxes promptly appeared. Meanwhile I removed my hat, and handed her my keys. I felt utterly desolate in this great strange house, among this silent horde of servants. However, I swallowed down my feelings, and began to unpack and dress.

"Burra khana" (big dinner), announced the ayah, as she unfolded my best white evening gown with obvious respect, and laid it out on a cane lounge. She was wonderfully deft and handy. Dulia, she informed me, was her name.

Then Dulia brushed my hair, shook out my travelling-dress, and, thanks to her nimble assistance, I was completely dressed and unpacked in about an hour's time.

There being nothing more to do, I graciously dismissed her, and sat down on the cane lounge in order to enjoy my own company. My heart was heavy, my mind full of misgivings. Was this the sort of reception to offer a guest who had come alone all the way from home to marry a near relative? or was I huffy and sensitive, and expecting too much? Perhaps there was a different code

of manners out in India. Perhaps I had made myself *cheap*. Perhaps—perhaps—— Here I realized that I was going to cry. How terrible! I must exert all my self-control now that I was on the threshold of a great event—the greatest event in my life. I knelt down by the side of a chair, all dressed in my best, and endeavoured to frame a little prayer. I had been in the train for two days. I had not said my prayers this morning; I would say them now. I buried my face between my hands, and I prayed that Walter might be what I desired; that I might be what he expected; that we might both be happy; that I might learn to do what was right among all these strangers; and—and—— There was a slight noise as of curtain-rings being sharply pushed aside, the sound of a quick footstep—not barefoot. I lifted my head and looked up.

A smartly dressed woman, with dark eyes and a wide-smiling mouth, was standing over me. And I was still on my knees!

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE TIN GOD

I MUST confess that I felt at a sore disadvantage as I struggled to my feet and confronted my strange hostess.

"Oh, my dear Miss Ferrars," she at once began, in a voluble key, "I am so glad to see you!"—here she gave my cheek a peck. "I have been at a Badminton tournament, and am sorry to be late; but surely you are not preparing to retire for the night?" and her little dark eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Oh no," I faltered. "I was saying my prayers."

"Do you always say them before dinner?"

"No; but this morning I was travelling, and——"

"Oh, you good, *good* girl!" she interrupted. "I hope you have been making yourself at home?" she continued, as she turned and seated herself in a deep wicker chair, and her small searching eyes scanned me narrowly, as I stood, still ill at ease, in the middle of the room.

"Yes, thank you," I replied, finding my tongue at last. "How is Walter, and when shall I see him?"

"My dear, he has been rather seedy—nothing serious; just a touch of local fever—and he feels a bit pulled down. He was not able to go to Bombay, but he will be here to-morrow; indeed, he may come at any hour, and when he

arrives, I am confident that the sight of *you* will completely restore him."

Was Mrs. Hassall making fun of me, or not? It was impossible to see her face, as she was in the act of removing her hat—a dainty affair covered with nodding roses, and exactly matching her pretty cotton gown.

"Had you a good passage?" she continued—"nice people, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes, thank you."

"What a brave girl you are, to come six thousand miles all by yourself to marry Walter! *I* never could have screwed my courage up to that pitch."

"No, I suppose it is unusual," I admitted, as I seated myself.

"By no means; many girls do the same when their *fiancés* cannot go home. By the way, how is Aunt Gussie?"

"She was quite well when I last saw her."

"You are an immense favourite with her," she continued, "and I believe she arranged it all. She is a wonderful woman. I hear she has given you a canteen; I saw some of your boxes in the verandah—the presents and trousseau, and cake—eh—Buzzard's, I hope?"

I nodded.

"I sent out all the invitations the moment the *Smyrna* was signalled, and the wedding will be on Saturday at two o'clock, so that will give you and Watty time to improve each other's acquaintance."

"A week is not a very long time," I said helplessly.

"A week is ample," she rejoined with energy. "Many girls are married in Bombay an hour after they land—buried the day they die: we manage all these things promptly in India. I have got you a capital ayah."

"Thank you," I murmured, in a faint voice.

"I intend to give you a grand send-off. The place is a little flat just now, and a wedding is always lively."

"Oh, I do hope I may have a quiet one."

"Your hope, my dear, is vain," she answered, with a smile that displayed most of her teeth. "I've got such a delicious gown; I've only worn it twice in Simla, and it has never had an opportunity of being seen here."

What petty affairs seemed to stand in the way of my wishes!—first a small flat, now a smart gown.

"I intend to have a large garden-party," resumed Tizzie—"I generally give one every season—and I shall have jugglers, and snake-charmers, and the band of the Buglers. I've issued two hundred invitations; the place wants shaking up."

"One would imagine it had a liver!" I exclaimed; "and surely you can shake it up without us?" I added, with unexpected audacity. "Do let us go to church quietly, and straight away afterwards—please."

"Why?" she asked sharply.

"Why should we be married to make a station holiday?"

"Simply because it is all settled," she replied. "Most girls are pleased to have a fuss made about their weddings. By the way, you are not the least like what I expected;" and a puzzled look came into her eyes—eyes merciless as a lancet.

"Am I not?" I answered; "but then, I have no idea of what you did expect."

"Well, more of a country mouse, or a bread-and-butter miss, you know."

"A bread-and-butter miss would be singularly suitable

to a tea estate," I said; "and I think I *am* rather in that style."

"Not a bit of it. You are much more stimulating than bread and scrape. I can see that you have ideas; that you can not only hold up your head, but hold your own; also, you know how to dress your hair and put on your clothes. That is a charming white frock—one of the trousseau, of course? I like those lace sleeves and the long train. I shall get my dirzee to look at it to-morrow."

"Of course, with pleasure," I murmured, granting a permission which was not required.

"You might have put on a tea-gown—only, you don't look a tea-gown girl;" and she patted my arm with two fingers. "There are two or three men coming to dinner, and after dinner we are all going on to a ball at the Club."

"But I need not go?" I protested anxiously.

"No, not if you are not keen. I see you are a little strange and afraid of us all, but you will soon get used to us and our funny ways," she answered indulgently.

I felt certain that I should never get used to her and her pitiless little eyes and hard face.

"You said that perhaps Walter might come," I ventured bashfully.

"Oh, dear me, yes; he is one of those uncomfortable people who turn up when least expected, and never when they are wanted—I did not mean that; of course, I am joking. He is not staying here; we have no room. His cousin Maxwell is taking him in. You have heard of Max?"

"No; who is he?"

"Why, he is our family star. Not heard of Maxwell Thorold? Immensely clever, a rising civilian, a little tin god, and a hardened bachelor."

"Oh, is he?" I answered indifferently.

"He is a dear fellow, and so generous to Watty always. He has given the house linen, glass, lamps, and crockery. *I* chose them."

Somehow, the triumphant announcement roused my ire in a manner unaccountable even to myself, and I was seized with an immediate prejudice against this paragon, this dear fellow who had endowed us with lamps and crockery, and who had been so "generous" to Watty.

"Maxwell would be a splendid match for any girl," she resumed, in a calmly irritating tone—"only, *he* does not see it."

"Perhaps the girls do not see it either," I retorted; for the praises of this Mr. Thorold, and the faint appreciation of *my* Mr. Thorold, stung me to exasperation.

But Tizzie's sole reply was a shrill peal of derisive laughter.

"Mrs. Hassall," I continued, "would you mind very much if I did not dine? You have company, you are all going to a ball, and I should be *so* glad if you would allow me to have something in here."

"Not dine?" she echoed. "What! waste that lovely frock on the desert air of my spare room? My dear, it is out of the question. They are all gasping to see you—only two ladies and four men; I always take my own supply to dances. And you know that a bride elect is naturally the heroine of the hour."

I was sensible of a cold shudder as she spoke. Six expectant strangers, all gasping to see me!

"And you are not to call me Mrs. Hassall, but Tizzie —short for Elizabeth. I shall be your cousin in a week. Well, now, I must run away and get into a tea-gown—I shall put on my war-paint after dinner; and whatever you do, do not play me the trick of undressing and going to bed."

As she spoke, she shook her fist at me playfully, and in another moment I saw the nodding roses and the smart pink skirt disappear behind the purdah.

CHAPTER VII

I SUMMON THE MEN!

In about twenty minutes' time Mrs. Hassall returned to fetch me. She now sailed in amidst billows of yellow skirts, and paused for a moment in order to afford me time to realize the picture. Tizzie had evidently relinquished all idea of the tea-gown; her spare figure was set off to admirable advantage by some far-distant *modiste;* her throat was encircled by a collar of pearls; a constellation of stars shone among her dark hair; and her little eyes twinkled with candid complacency.

"Now come along," she said, stretching forth a thin bangled arm; "it is nearly eight o'clock, and Horace is so fussy. He keeps driving me round like a hen in a garden, and says I'm always late."

As she chattered, she conducted me into the drawing-room. It was empty, to my profound relief, save for a little stout man with an immense expanse of shirt-front. He came forward and held out his hand.

"This is my husband—Colonel Hassall," explained Tizzie.

"Charmed to welcome you;" then he added, with a significant smile, "only sorry that your visit will be so short."

"My dear Horace," interrupted his wife, "I wish you would go and see that Ahmed has got hold of the proper claret on this occasion. Last time—remember the bumpers of port! And do *you* sit down and look as if you belonged to the house," she continued, turning to me. "Take that corner of the sofa, and tell me how you like my room."

I looked around as desired, and slowly inspected the apartment. It was large—in fact, to an English eye it seemed immense. Three long glass doors opened into a verandah. There were picturesque corners and deep recesses; in one stood a grand piano; opposite to this was the fireplace, and a fire of logs, for it was the cold season. The floor was covered with fine matting, on which were Persian rugs; the draperies were a pale pink, the furniture was of white wood; and I noticed quantities of tall palms various comfortable sofas and chairs, pictures, photographs, and knick-knacks, all illuminated by softly shaded lamps; everything was *couleur de rose*.

"I think it is the prettiest room I've ever seen," I announced at last.

"I'm so glad you like it; it is considered to be the model for all Bareda. I took immense trouble; but then, you see, we are settled here for five years, and it is worth while. Now I will tell you who are coming to dinner: Colonel and Mrs. Metcalfe of the Buglers; also Captain Mallard, Miss Flasham, the beauty of the station, and two odd men. Oh, here they are!" as at this moment a hollow rumbling under the porch testified to their arrival, and presently the guests appeared almost in a body. First Mrs. Metcalfe, a little woman with a *nez retroussé* and lovely eyes, animated and well dressed—her husband a square-shouldered, soldierly-looking man; next, Miss

Flasham, a pretty blonde in a black gown glimmering with silver sequins; Captain Mallard, a cheery young officer with a large nose and a pair of quick blue eyes. He was my dinner partner, and as we marched off arm-in-arm, he somehow contrived to put me at ease at once.

I could not help admiring the elegance of the table decorations, the daintiness of the dinner, the deft waiting of the numerous crested servants in snow white, each man attending exclusively on his own master with the stern determination that he was to be the best served, and I noticed once a fierce contest between two bearded butlers —they were actually wrestling over a dish of peas. I had ample time to observe when my partner was drawn into the vortex of general conversation, and Colonel Hassall, on my other hand, was deep in a discussion with Colonel Metcalfe respecting the recent riot in the "Gorah" Bazaar. These Anglo-Indians, with their self-centred interests and local allusions, were a revelation to me. Tizzie kept the ball of talk rolling gaily; she chattered with as much eyebrow- and shoulder-lifting as a foreigner, and she talked not only for herself but also for *me*.

"I hope you are coming on to the ball to-night, Miss Ferrars?" inquired my partner.

"No," I answered, "I think not."

"Is it not too bad of her to play the Cinderella at home?" broke in Tizzie in her shrill voice. "My reputation as a hostess will be destroyed."

"Oh, nothing short of a deluge could injure that," rejoined my companion politely.

"I think you are very idiotic," continued Tizzie, haranguing me across the table; "you won't have many balls at Rutnagherry, *I* can assure you."

"But I don't much care for dancing," I boldly announced.

"Well, then, come and look on. It will amuse you to chaperon me—you can sit out."

"But I would so much rather sit at home—if I may," I urged tenaciously.

"Oh, very well, then; have your own way. As you don't dance, you and Watty have another point in common. He is too terrible; he"—now addressing the whole company—"drags his partner round exactly as if she were a sack of coals."

I felt my cheeks flame. Why did Tizzie make these little speeches about her cousin, unless she wished to punish me for my obstinacy and lacerate my feelings? I believe my neighbour pitied me, for he instantly started a fresh topic by inquiring—

"What were the new books when you left home, Miss Ferrars?—anything epoch-making?"

"I am afraid you could not ask a worse person," I replied. "We lived in the depths of the country, and only belonged to the parish library."

"The parish library!" screamed Tizzie. "'Peter Parley,' and 'Peep of Day'!" At this moment her attention was happily diverted by Mrs. Metcalfe, who offered her a delicate compliment on some new dish and on her cook; and they there and then fell into an animated discussion respecting housekeeping.

"The whole thing appears so much easier than it is at home," remarked Mrs. Metcalfe vivaciously. "There I lived in abject terror of my retinue. I never saw one of them suddenly enter a room, that I did not expect 'a month's notice.' They objected to my having company, and yet *they* were constantly out."

"Ah, here it is perfectly simple," replied Tizzie. "Whenever you wish to give a dinner or any festivity, you call up your butler, announce the fact, and, with a wave of your hand, say, 'Bundobast kurroo!'—that is all."

"What is the meaning of those magic words?" I inquired of my companion—"another form of 'Open Sesame'?"

"Just 'make arrangements;' and they *are* made, I can assure you. The great matter is, to have a good head man—an administrator. I am"—lowering his voice—"going to be married myself, so I offer you this little hint."

"Thank you," I answered; "I accept it gratefully, though on a tea estate, miles from any one, we are not likely to do much entertaining."

"A tea estate!" he repeated, with a gaze of amazed interrogation. "You look more like a girl who would spend your time between Calcutta and Simla."

"Is—she—coming out from home?" I ventured timidly.

"No; she's in Calcutta now. Her father is in the Revenue Department. I met her in Simla last season. By the way, I never came across *your* Mr. Thorold; but I know his cousin in the Civil Service—a capital polo-player, and an extraordinarily good-looking fellow." I was beginning to hate this cousin. "I met another Thorold once up in Tirhoot—a seedy sort of chap, and rather a bad hat; no relation, of course?"

"No relation, I should hope," I answered indifferently. "Most likely it was an assumed name."

"And so you only arrived here to-day?" questioned Captain Mallard.

"Yes, a few hours ago."

"Ah! I wonder what you will think of India in a few years' time?"

"I wonder?" I echoed wistfully.

"I don't fancy you will find it a land of regrets."

"No? How do you find it?"

"A land of mystery—of great surprises—and so far, to me it has brought good fortune."

"Then, you met *her* here?" I suggested softly.

"Yes," he responded, with an elated laugh. "How nicely you put it, Miss Ferrars!"

"Is your regiment stationed in Bareda?" I continued.

"My battery is; I'm in the Artillery: poor, proud, and prejudiced, you know."

"No, I did not know," I answered with humility. "I am so disgracefully ignorant of military matters."

"Well, that's the saying; and the Engineers are mad, married, and Methodist," he added; and his blue eyes twinkled.

"Excuse me, but I cannot believe it," was my startling reply.

"Just as you like—it's not exactly one of the Thirty-nine Articles. I say, never mind; I'm only joking. By the way, are you musical? are you fond of music?"

"Yes; I love it."

"So do I," he rejoined, with unexpected vehemence; and upon this mutual confession we immediately embarked on the full tide of an engrossing topic. Just as I had offered my opinion of Wagner, I caught Tizzie's eye—and what a speaking little eye it was!—and rose. As we passed into the drawing-room, she put her arm affectionately round my waist, and said—

"Upon my word, for a new arrival, and a girl eating her first dinner in India, you did well. You and Captain Mallard found plenty to say to one another; he is a nice fellow, and crazy about music. He is going to be married, too—such a pity."

"Why do you say so?" I inquired. "Do you disapprove of matrimony?"

"Only on general grounds. I like all girls to be married, and I like all men to remain bachelors. Of course, the idea won't work," she added, with a laugh. "After all, getting married is an easy matter; the difficulty is to remain married."

"What an extraordinarily dark saying! Do please explain."

"Oh, never mind. I often say things I don't mean. You play, don't you?" she inquired carelessly.

"Yes."

"I wonder you do not say 'a little.' It's *the* answer."

"But I play a good deal," I protested. "Why should I pretend?"

"Oh dear, and Watty does not know 'Rule, Britannia' from 'Soldiers of the Queen.' Well, now, I want you to go over and sit on the sofa, and make friends with Miss Flashman. Here," she continued, leading me up to the station belle, "is next Saturday's victim for you. You and she can put your heads together and talk chiffons."

"I suppose you have heard that I am to be one of your bridesmaids?" said Miss Flashman, with a brilliant smile, as she made room for me beside her,—"a girl you have never spoken to till now! Does it not seem too extraordinary?"

"Not more than anything else," I answered
among the cushions; "everything is extraordi
as yet. It is very kind of you to befriend me.

"Back you up, you mean. Oh, it's rather
and Lena Miller and Amy Colthurst are
quartette, with a sweet love of a white satin
Gillan's boy. It's his fancy dress, you know,
grimy. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. What do you wear?"

"Oh, white, with green sashes and green in

"It ought to be the colour of green tea,"
"and bouquets of tea roses."

"Oh, it's a much prettier colour," sh
solemnly. "I am so glad you are not supe
green is thought such an unlucky choice for
but this shade is so becoming."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear it."

"And there are to be four groomsmen, wit
white favours. Did you know?"

"No; I have not had time to hear any deta

"Mrs. Hassall is such a truly marvellous n
good at getting up theatricals and shows of
full of ideas and resources and energy. But
odd that I, a stranger, should be telling *yo*
your own wedding. It is to be at half-past
reception and garden-party immediately after
at half-past three. You leave at five. You
about Dola?"

"No. What is Dola—something to eat?"

"No!" with a peal of laughter. "A raja.
he always lends it out for honeymoons. Ever
there who is married in this district. The Ar

to perform the ceremony, and Mr. Thorold is to give you away."

"But why Mr. Thorold?" I asked irritably.

"Because he is a great swell—the collector here, and your *fiancé's* cousin."

"Oh, yes; the little tin god, whatever that may be," I retorted flippantly. "Tizzie mentioned him before dinner."

"She thinks there is no one like him," resumed my companion. "And he *is* nice, though I don't go as far as Mrs. Hassall, who talks of his heart of gold and his will of steel."

"How ridiculous! And has he a silver head and iron hand?" I scoffed; "or is he a mere brazen image with feet of clay?" for I was jealous, unaccountably jealous, on behalf of *my* Mr. Thorold.

"He has not one silver hair as yet among his raven locks," she replied. "As for his feet, they are running nimbly up the ladder of promotion. Whoever has the good fortune to be Mrs. Thorold will probably find herself the wife of an L.G."

"An L.G.!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean a T.G.?"

"No; Lieutenant-Governor."

"But I thought he was a civilian?"

"Yes, so he is. An L.G. is the highest post next to the Viceroy, and means guns, red carpets, palaces, royal state, and the National Anthem, not to speak of ruling over a kingdom as large as France."

"Dear me! what a pitiable ignoramus I am!"

"How could you expect to know everything by instinct, when you only arrived to-day? I wish you were coming to the ball at the Club."

"Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry to interrupt you," s

Tizzie, bustling over, "but I know that you play; I heard you discoursing at dinner of Grieg and Bendell. Come, I want you to strike up something—anything; it's only to bring in the men. I cannot have them sitting smoking for hours; time is getting on, and we must soon make a start."

She led the way to the piano, and I followed without any resistance, and sat down at the instrument, a fine Bechstein, and played as requested—in order to summon the men. As soon as my fingers touched the keys, my nervousness seemed to evaporate. I was not in the least timid; I had played in Munich at school concerts, and to severely critical audiences. After a few chords and a prelude, I took off my bangles, and struck into the "Bird Motive" from Siegfried. From this I passed into a Norwegian song, and to Bendell's "Sunday Morning." I was playing to please myself, as well as to summon the men. I felt carried out of my environment, and imparted my disappointments, anxieties, and tremors to the piano. I utterly forgot where I was, and my unique surroundings, for I was seated with my back to the room. Presently I paused, and glanced over my shoulder. Yes, the men were there; the ladies too had risen. Captain Mallard was on my left; the summons had been effectual. As I took my hands from the key-board, there was a long pause—a pause of complimentary and astounded silence, and then came applause—too much applause.

"I had no idea you were so accomplished," exclaimed Tizzie. "You would be invaluable here, and I really do not see how we can spare such music to a tea estate; it is just wicked waste."

Captain Mallard, Miss Flashman, and the rest crowded

around me with thanks and questions, and repeated entreaties to accompany them to the ball, even if I only sat and looked on.

"It *would* be fun!" urged Miss Flashman. "Do come; you will be so dull here all alone."

"I am not so sure that she *will* be alone," broke in Tizzie, with a laugh of sly significance. "And here are the carriages; we must sort ourselves and hurry off, or we shall be late. I'm engaged for the first dance, and the ball begins at nine o'clock sharp."

While the guests trooped out, Tizzie hurried back to me in her long opera-cloak, and said—

"Well, good night, my dear. Remember, I leave you in charge of the house. Don't sit up if you are tired. I doubt if he will come to-night." A momentary pause, and she patted my arm, and added, "You are not the least little bit like what I expected;" then she ran off.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPELL IS BROKEN

As soon as I heard the gay voices cease, and the cavalcade roll away, I returned to the piano. I felt that it was my only sympathetic friend, and that never had I wanted a friend and confidante so much. As I sat motionless before it, a bearer entered noiselessly, and was about to extinguish the lights—some were already put out—when he caught sight of me. But those standard lamps in the middle of the room were ample; I rather preferred a dim twilight to a glare, and I was playing without notes.

I signed to him, and then proceeded to air one of the two or three Hindustani words I knew. "Bus," I ejaculated, which signifies "enough." He understood my order, salaamed profoundly, and took his stealthy departure. I think I must have been playing for nearly an hour when the little silver clock struck ten. I had calmed and soothed myself into a dreamy and serene frame of mind, and was about to close the instrument, when I heard footsteps outside—a quick ringing footfall; it went up the steps; it came steadily along the matted verandah. He had arrived; it was Walter at last! I listened with an expectation that was painful in its intensity—listened to the footfall of my approaching fate. The Japanese bead

curtain quickly tinkled aside, and a sonorous voice announced, "Thorold Sahib."

Yes, it was he. We were far apart at the opposite ends of the vast room, and I advanced slowly from my dim retreat into the space which came within the radius of the rose-shaded lamps, to met the original of the photograph.

"Walter!" I murmured, half under my breath; and then I came to a full stop. He seemed so—so constrained and surprised. Yes, his eyes expressed unlimited amazement—and was it admiration? Of course, Walter saw me greatly altered. I was no longer a tomboy, but a grown-up young lady, with my locks becomingly arranged, wearing a picturesque white gown and a Moorish necklet (which had been my mother's). I could see myself, tall and white, reflected in a mirror. But why did he not speak? Only a few seconds had elapsed since the bearer announced "Thorold Sahib," and the time seemed an age. Suddenly he approached within two or three yards.

"Miss Ferrars, I conclude?" he said; and then I realized that—yes—this man was a stranger! He was older, darker, taller than my *fiancé;* the firm glance of his eye, the strong lines of the mouth, the calm assurance of bearing, had never been Walter's.

"I am afraid I represent a great disappointment," he resumed, in a full clear voice, as he displayed the telegram; and then added with a smile, "You were expecting some one else—my cousin Walter."

I stretched out my hand and grasped the back of the chair, for I was trembling from head to foot, and the room was wheeling round.

"I am really extremely sorry," he went on. "I see

you are upset; but he will be here to-morrow by the"—glancing at the telegram in his hand—"11.20. He is going to stay with me, you know."

This, then, was the little tin god! This, too, was the man I had come out to marry! Older-looking than the photograph—for the lines in the forehead had been carefully erased—older than Walter by five or six years; but it was the same fine noble face which had captivated me. How could I ever have imagined that Walter would grow like him? And yet there was a resemblance between the cousins, such as there is between the same outline sharply cut or carelessly blurred and smudged. I retreated several steps, and retired towards the piano. My first instinct was to seek the shadows, where I could escape from the proximity of those dark questioning eyes. Oh, if he should guess the truth—that I, Pamela Ferrars, had crossed the sea in order to marry *him*, and not his cousin Walter! If he ever knew, I should die of shame. I must brace myself up, summon all the pride and self-control for which Mrs. Evans had given me credit, and go through this ordeal bravely.

I bit my lip till I felt the warm blood trickle down my chin, then quickly stanched it with my handkerchief; but I could not frame one word—no, not one.

Meanwhile, my visitor, believing me to be overwhelmed with shyness, humanely endeavoured to put me at my ease—me, his future cousin, to whom he had given breakfast-cups and lamps—the bride elect, the heroine of the hour! What put such things as breakfast-cups into my head? Awful idea! Was I about to go into hysterics? Did they begin like this?

He was speaking now, and said, "I have been standing

outside for the last quarter of an hour, enthralled by your wonderful gift. It was a rare treat, I can assure you. I am so fond of music, and I hear so little nowadays. You can make that piano speak—ay, and sing and whisper and sob."

I muttered something incoherent and inarticulate, which he graciously accepted as a remark.

"Outside in the garden the melodies seemed to come from the moonbeams—they did not sound like earthly strains. I dared not venture to enter—I guessed that it was you, for Tizzie is not musical—and I was afraid to break the spell."

But the spell of another description was broken.

"I hope you had a good passage," he continued politely.

"Yes; it was rather—dusty," I answered. I saw him stare, and added precipitately, "I mean, crowded." And then I sat down on the music-stool, and once more there was an awkward pause.

"Would you do me a great favour, and play something more?" he asked; "just one piece—anything you please." As he spoke, he came nearer. "If you only knew what a rare pleasure it is, I am sure you would not refuse."

Nor would I. The piano gave me confidence and support. It was far easier to make it speak than to use my own tongue.

"Anything you please," he reiterated, leaning his elbow on the instrument.

Anything I pleased! His face expressed a certain amount of surprise when, after a moment's hesitation, I struck the first solemn impressive chords of Beethoven's "Funeral March on the Death of a Hero."

Why not, since my hero was dead? I played on

steadily, fervently—and, strange to say, faultlessly. All the time I was conscious that the little tin god's eyes never left my face. When at last the final chord had died away in silence, he lifted his elbow from the piano, drew a long breath, and exclaimed—

"Magnificent! But what an extraordinary choice for a bride!"

"Oh, is it?"

"Surely you don't believe that marriage is the grave of love, and that you were playing its requiem!—do you?"

I made no reply; I was gathering up my bangles.

"That is your photograph, is it not?" I asked, with extraordinary irrelevance, suddenly pointing to an enlarged copy of the one in my possession, which I now noticed for the first time.

"Yes, my very latest; rather flattering. Sorry I was taken in that straw hat."

"Why?"

"Because"—and he smiled broadly—"every one suspects that I am bald; bald men are always done in their headgear."

"Oh, are they?" I murmured.

"I see you stood out against the ball. I suppose you half expected Watty. I expected him too."

"Did you? I am so tired," I said, rising, "that I must ask you to excuse me."

"Of course; certainly. I merely came to show you the wire. You do look fagged and done up. I'll be sure to bring Watty over the moment he arrives—not that he will want any bringing. Good night."

He seemed half inclined to advance and offer me his hand—the hand of my future cousin; but I drew myself

up and made him a formal Continental bow, and swept out of the room with all the dignity afforded by a long trailing train and an irreproachable gown. I had held up bravely; my pride and self-control had supported me; and now I might break down as soon as I pleased. I really cannot remember how I reached my apartment, but I discovered that it had folding doors as well as the curtains, and these I dragged together; then I blew out the lamp, and flung myself prostrate on my bed in all my finery of white brocade and chiffon—a heap of solid misery. My head was burning, but nevertheless I endeavoured to readjust the situation, my thoughts, and my plans. If Watty had intentionally misled me, I would not marry him—party with jugglers, bridesmaids, and page notwithstanding. I would free myself, and become that terrible, pitiable object—a forlorn and friendless girl in India. But where was I to go, and what was to become of me?

CHAPTER IX

ONLY A JOKE

Hour after hour I lay awake, although I was so tired that my bones ached with sheer weariness; but my overwrought brain was far too active to suffer my body to rest. I heard the melancholy cry of the jackal, the return of the ball-goers, the timid crow of some young cock. At last I fell into a sort of fitful slumber, from which I was prematurely roused by the splash of water being poured into my tub in the next room, and I gradually became aware of the notes of strange birds, the neighing of horses, and the cool penetrating air of an Indian morning; and there was I coiled up in my beautiful white gown, precisely as I had thrown myself down on my bed. Had I been ill? What did it mean? I lay for a moment endeavouring to collect ideas, and vaguely conscious of some dim shadow; then it all came back in one overwhelming cloud. And now the door was pushed open, and the ayah, with a shawl over her head, entered stealthily. At the first sight of me and my attire, she nearly let fall the tray and tea-things she was carrying—such was the shock to her equilibrium; but she promptly recovered, and asked in a querulous key—

"Why missy never calling for me last night?—missy never taking off dress?"

"I did not require you," I replied, rising to my feet and walking over to a chair. "But I shall be glad of some tea now."

The ayah disguised her astonishment quite admirably. Here, indeed, was a singular English girl, who slept in her best gown! However, it was not her affair (though perhaps she mentioned the eccentricity to other ayahs as possibly the latest European fashion). She bustled about, preparing my toilet, whilst I poured out and drank off a cup of tea; it did me good—so did an ice-cold bath—and, wonderfully refreshed and revived, I dressed myself with all speed. This accomplished, I went and looked out through the thin chick, which hung over a door opening into the verandah. The verandah was embowered in yellow roses, still drenched in dew, and furnished with cane chairs and great pots of palms and variegated plants. In and out among these, two pretty squirrels were playing hide-and-seek. Close by, a gardener, with thin bare legs, but his head heavily muffled in a turban and brown blanket, was squatting on his heels and working with a hoe. Beyond the feathery bamboo clumps, big shrubs, and trees, I heard the sound of bugles, for Bareda was a large military station. I remained for a long time gazing out through this chick—a thin blind of bamboo, common to India and other hot countries; from behind one, you can see distinctly and yet not be seen. As no one appeared to be stirring, I resolved to descend into the grounds, garden, compound, or whatever it was called, and explore. My thoughts, such as they were, came more readily when I was walking. I had need of serious thought now. I took my hat and fur boa, and stepped

down on to the hard gravel drive. The bungalow, as I examined it from the exterior, was large, white, and flat; its walls and pillars were painted bright yellow. It was an ornamental edifice, something like a huge wedding-cake, and it was set off by a dark green background of luxuriant flowering shrubs, and approached by two smooth avenues, the colour of terra-cotta. The whole effect was gaudy in the extreme: a clear-cut white house, green trees, red paths, all stamped upon a hard blue sky. The surroundings were cunningly contrived to give an appearance of extent, but in reality the compound was small, and I had soon inspected it from end to end. It was kept in perfect order; white stone water-channels outlined the paths, the grass-plots were smooth as velvet, the rose-trees drilled like soldiers on parade, each erect, labelled, and staked. The last time I had walked alone—or, indeed, walked on mother earth—had been at Beverly. What a contrast between that great brick-walled neglected old garden and this! —one with its bare leafless trees, its barren plots, and faded cabbage-stalks, its forlorn row of empty greenhouses, and this well-cared-for richly furnished Indian compound, with trickling water, masses of gay flowers, and gorgeous trailing creepers! There were two entrances—white plaster pillars, and wide-open wooden gates. I passed through one of these, and noticed a black board nailed to a pillar, on which was painted in large letters—

"COLONEL HASSALL, CANTONMENT MAGISTRATE."

Beyond the road there was a wide green plain, on which I discerned, at a distance, soldiers drilling and artillery galloping. Around this plain were many

bungalows and buildings at irregular intervals, and visible among a fringe of trees was the spire of a church. I saw many Europeans riding and driving, natives herding droves of goats, or tiny donkeys staggering under enormous bundles, parties of chattering soldiers' wives—evidently returning from the bazaars—and long strings of soft-footed supercilious-looking camels. I kept far aloof from the dusty road, and walked on the great park-like maidan, where no one cast a glance at me. I paced to and fro, under the shade of strange majestic trees; I was striving to make up my mind as I walked mechanically backwards and forwards, a prey to despair and indecision. I was endeavouring to formulate my life. What would to-day bring?—Watty. And after Watty? —marriage, misery, self-abhorrence. If at the eleventh hour I drew back, I should have to face an angry outcry, crushing ridicule, and a homeless future. I struggled hard to be cool and practical, and to consider both sides of this grave question; and yet, when a station *gurra* clanged nine strokes, I had only arrived at *one* decision—I had resolved to speak to Tizzie without delay. As I turned back to the bungalow, my plans still chaotic, my mind in a maze, I noticed a gentleman ride rapidly down one avenue, as I walked up the other. He caught sight of me, and raised his Terai hat, and I then recognized Maxwell Thorold. What an early visitor he had been! Breakfast had commenced when I entered the dining-room. I found Colonel and Mrs. Hassall already at table; the latter was looking quite alert and fresh, though by daylight her complexion was decidedly sallow. A quantity of letters were piled near her plate, and the envelopes were scattered in all directions and over the floor.

"Ah! so, here you are!" she cried, with the sugar-tongs poised in her hand. "I was beginning to fear you had run away. You have been out for a walk, and must be ready for your breakfast."

"Yes, thank you; I believe I am," I responded, as I took my place.

"Well, Miss Ferrars, how did you sleep?" inquired Colonel Hassall. "I hope you are rested, and ready to face this eventful day, eh?" and he beamed upon me benignly. His loquacious wife snatched the reply from my lips by exclaiming—

"I declare, she looks as if she had been up all night, instead of *me*, does she not?"

"I am quite rested, thank you," I rejoined hastily, anxious to turn the subject from my appearance. "I hope you enjoyed the ball, Mrs. Hassall?"

"Not Mrs. Hassall—Tizzie," she corrected. "Yes, I enjoyed it enormously. I was not home till three o'clock, and I should not be here now, but in bed, only this is going to be such a busy day;" and she took up a heap of notes and glanced at them. "These are all acceptances, of course; people know that I am going to do the thing well, very different from that shabby Grigson affair. Would you care to see any of these?"—half offering me a handful.

"But I don't know the people," I stammered.

"Here is something that is far more likely to amuse you, Miss Ferrars," said her husband. "Have you ever seen a real Baboo epistle?" and he handed me a letter written on a sheet of thin brown paper, in a small neat hand, adding as introduction, "It is from one of my office clerks."

"*To* COLONEL HASSALL, Esq." (it began).

"DEAR SIR,

"I have the honour, and am sorry to report for your Worship's information that I am compelled to be absent to-day from my office. Though not immediate, yet the anticipation of the reproach of apprehending plague (Heaven forbid to which I am not yet a victim) is the approximate cause of my non-attendance. This morning having had to translate our family, the females in particular, abroad to some distant regions of this country, as is the case with the inhabitants, I am put to great inconvenience with regard to cooking, and although I am not well expert in the business, the art of cooking, yet I am unavoidably anxious to do the work, and awfully delayed in the matter. Some better arrangement will be made from to-morrow. Praying to be excused for the indulgence, I beg to remain, Sir,

"Your Majesty's obedient servant,

"JADWALL DASS."

"He is death on long words, is he not?" said Colonel Hassall, with a grin.

"Yes; and how well he spells!" I commented. "But is the plague here in Bareda?"

"Oh dear, no, not within a couple of hundred miles; but I see by this morning's paper"—and here he glanced over at Tizzie—"that it is raging at Gurghee."

"My dear man, pray don't talk of such a loathsome subject," she protested impatiently. "My mind is full of Pamela's wedding, and I can only take in one thing at a time; and, anyway, I'm not going to worry about the scare. *I* am not a Baboo, and it does not affect

Europeans. Horace, I've been thinking that I must have the Club shammiana, after all."

"What is that?" I inquired.

"Oh, a big tent. You"—looking at me steadily—"will have your work cut out. I want to have your cake unpacked, to see if it's all right. We must unearth some of the best presents, just to show; and your wedding-dress will be all the better for unpacking. White satin, I hope?"

"Yes, but perfectly plain," I answered meekly.

"We will get it unfolded as soon as I've seen the khansamah, and written a few notes. Your bridesmaids are coming to tiffin, and their dresses are to be tried on here afterwards; they must all be alike, and I'm going to have a full dress rehearsal. Everything I have a hand in is pucka; I do nothing by halves."

"Full of energy, isn't she?" exclaimed her admiring husband, emerging from behind his paper. "She is in her element now; you love running a show, don't you, Tizzie,—and a wedding, for choice?"

"Come," she said, standing up and rapidly collecting the letters; "if you are ready, Pamela, we will go."

I rose at once, and we passed together into the drawing-room. Yes, I was ready, though I felt sick with apprehension.

"I have something to say to you," I commenced, in a shaky voice.

"Then, I'm delighted to hear it, my dear, for I began to think that you had lost the gift of speech. What is it? Come; I'm rather pressed for time."

"Excuse me for a moment, and you will soon see," I said, hurrying into my room adjoining, and returning,

a little out of breath, with the blue morocco case. "It is this," I said, placing it in her hand.

"Max's last, I declare! But how has it come into *your* possession?" she asked, in the key of F sharp.

Before I could answer, she had re-examined it, and seen an inscription across one corner. "Pam, with Walter's love," she read aloud; "Pam, with Walter's love," she repeated, suddenly setting it down as she spoke; then she raised her quick little eyes to mine, and murmured almost under her breath, "What does it mean?"

"Walter sent it to me as his own photograph," I replied expressively.

"Then, *this*"—holding up the portrait—"is the man you came out to marry?"

He was, but I made no reply; silence gave consent.

"But, good heavens! child," she continued excitedly, "there must be some hideous mistake! It is impossible that Watty sent you this as his own likeness?"

"Look at his name, and mine," I rejoined, in a cool unimpassioned key. "You know the writing." My courage had undoubtedly mounted with occasion. I seemed to be standing by and listening to a stranger.

"Well," she began, after a long pause, "he appears to have played you a pretty trick! I cannot make it out, but of course he will explain when he sees you. He will be here in less than an hour," she added, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "But," as if suddenly struck by an idea, "who enlightened you? How did you discover that this"—holding it out—"is not Watty?"

"I saw the original last evening, after you left," I replied, with complete composure. "He brought a telegram."

"Of course! so he did. And he was here this morning;

that explains it. He heard you playing. He declares that you rivalled St. Cecilia; yes, and "—with a little titter —"I asked him what he thought of you. Shall I tell you what he said?"

"No, no; I hate to hear what people think of me," I hastily protested.

"Dear me, how silly!" exclaimed Tizzie. "I like to be told what people say of me. I don't mind confessing that you are not the least little bit in my style. A woman cannot be too dark to please *me;* but when you suddenly emerged into the light, a tall fair girl in white, with the eyes of a frightened fawn, Max declares that you resembled some lovely vision from another world, and were as mysterious, ethereal, and silent. Of course, *I* can understand it; his unexpected visit was a shock. He says that he ran over with the telegram, not intending to show, but that your exquisite music lured him into your presence. See what a siren you are!" and she gave a little contemptuous laugh. "You will have scores of the young planters under your spell. All the same, I wish Max had stayed at home instead of prowling over here."

"His visits are certainly made at remarkable hours," I observed—"ten o'clock at night, and before nine in the morning."

"Oh, pooh; that's India!—you will get used to that. But I do wish you had seen Watty first; then it would not have mattered about the photograph. I'm really annoyed with Watty; he carries a joke too far."

"Do you call it a joke?" I asked sharply.

"Why, of course I do. What else?" she inquired, rising as she spoke, with a stare of scornful amazement. "I must see the khansamah, and get your cake unpacked;

and if you will give me the keys of your big box, the ayah will set to work at your dresses at once."

I stood for a moment hesitating; at last I handed her the keys—they committed me to nothing.

"I must confess, you are terribly solemn for a bride elect," she said, stroking my cheek with two of her bony fingers. "Do cheer up; you look like a ghost."

I struggled hard to speak, but I was much nearer to crying than cheering up.

"You would like to receive Watty alone here when he comes?"

"Thank you; that will be best."

"Now, you won't be *very* severe with him, will you?" she urged, with a coaxing smile; but her eyes were hard. "I'm afraid you have been idealizing him. He is rather weak and easily led, but *so* good-natured; and he means well, poor Watty! A wife such as yourself will be the making of him, and worth your weight in gold;" and with this extravagant compliment she left me.

CHAPTER X

THE FOOTSTEP OF FATE

WHEN Tizzie, gaily jingling my keys, had taken her departure, I went and threw myself into a low chair, and clasped my hands behind my burning head. I could not retire to my room, for the ayah was in possession; and here at least I was alone, whilst after Saturday I should never be alone again. Why not?—I was still free, still my own mistress. Oh, for a little courage—oh, for a great deal of courage! There I sat, waiting in a kind of subdued choking suspense, with my eyes fastened on the dainty silver clock. Suddenly there was a sound of wheels. It could not be Walter already. He was much before his time; it was but ten minutes past eleven. Ah, the wheels were turning into the compound. I sat erect and stared out, my heart all the while beating in heavy thumps. I saw a station gharry, with a battered portmanteau on the roof, whirl by; it subsided under the porch. There were eager greetings; a man's voice asked—

"Has she come? Well, what do you think of her?"

"What she will think of *you* is far more to the purpose," came an answer in a clear treble, startlingly close at hand. "Here, do put your tie straight! Why didn't you have your hair cut? Hu-ssh, hu-ssh! she's in there."

I rose to my feet as the jingling screen was pushed aside, and this time a fair, undersized, slovenly young man in creased flannels hurried into the room.

"Pam!" he exclaimed, advancing with outstretched arms. "Oh, I say, Pam, you *are* a beauty!"

Yes, this was Walter. How the soft blur of forgetfulness had taken the edge off my memory! Not much altered, and by no means improved. His face was blotchy and sodden; his pale blue eyes appeared to have faded; he was dishevelled and dusty, and slouched as he walked. I put out my hand, sternly ignoring the proffered embrace.

"Pam, I declare you are splendid!" he cried, seizing on it. "You've grown a foot."

"Only two inches," I replied, in my most formal manner.

"You are splendid," he reiterated. "I'm awfully sorry I could not meet you—bad go of fever—all right by Saturday;" and he gave a little nervous laugh. Oh, how it all came back—his drawling tone, his little cackle!

"Aren't you a wee bit glad to see your old Watty? Eh? Why are you so stand-off? I say, what's the matter?"

"Everything is the matter," I rejoined, with emphasis. "Why did you send me your cousin's photograph, and pretend that it was your own?"

"Oh! so, that's it; that accounts for the milk in the cocoanut! My dear, I only did it for a lark—well, then, a lure. You see, he and I are as like as twins—or two peas."

What fatuous vanity was this!

"I saw your photograph in a group, and it fetched me at once, so I thought a flattering likeness of me would

fetch you—see? Sure enough it did, and here you are"—again trying to clasp me in his arms; but I pushed him away, and sat down in an easy-chair. He merely laughed at this rebuff, and said, "All women admire Max, as a mixture of Sir Galahad and Warren Hastings; he was only a bait; I"—patting his creased flannel coat—"am the real Simon Pure. It was just a dodge, and now you are here you belong to *me*."

"No, never, never!" I cried passionately.

"Why, there was a touch of the old Pam! otherwise, you are so changed I'd never have known you. I remember your tantrums, and how you got over them. I said to myself, you were bound to be in a jolly rage when you discovered my little ruse, but it all blows over."

"This will not blow over, I warn you; I shall not marry you."

"But, my darling girl, what else can you do?" he asked, squaring himself on the rug. "Come, now, be sensible; don't lose your head or your temper; be calm."

"Oh, I'm perfectly calm," I answered—the calm before the storm.

"Tizzie hates girl guests, especially if they are good-looking. She only bargained for you for one week. Where are you to go, if you won't be Mrs. Walter? Come, I'll make you a good husband—I will, indeed. I swear I'll reform."

"Reform?" I repeated interrogatively.

"I suppose"—becoming rather red—"the mater never dropped a hint? By George, Pam, you are magnificent when you look like that! I see I may as well start with a clean breast; if I don't tell you, some other kind friend will. Well, the fact is, I have not been very steady."

And he surveyed me with a look that was half shamefaced, half sly; but I remained silent, and this attitude disconcerted him not a little.

"You know, it's a thirsty country," he stammered, "and the mater thought a wife would be the making of me."

"Yes; your cousin thinks the same."

I was not the least nervous. Here was the old easy-going, self-excusing Watty; the boy had deteriorated into the man. I felt nothing for the slovenly apologetic figure on the hearthrug but the heartiest contempt.

"The mater suggested a nice, pretty, cheerful girl, not accustomed to society or extravagance, and she pitched on *you*—and here you are."

"Here I am, indeed!" I admitted gravely.

"We shall jog along capitally, you will see. You are a million times handsomer than I expected. You will take the shine out of the other women. They will wonder how I got hold of such a star. How they will stare when they see you!"

"Yes, and when they don't see me," I muttered under my breath.

"Our nearest neighbours are only fourteen miles away; you shall have a jolly pony. I'm an easy-going fellow, you know—all for peace. You shall keep the rupees, and run our little show."

From his important tone and air of genial indulgence, one would have supposed that he was offering me a throne. I could not restrain an involuntary laugh; then a thought suddenly struck me, and I said—

"And your letters—what did they mean? You never hinted at a thirst, or—or anything."

"Oh, the letters!" he repeated; "weren't they A1?

Since I am in the confessional, I'll tell you about them, shall I?"

"Pray do," I urged expressively.

"The letters were first-class"—rubbing his hands ecstatically. "They were written by Rutherford, another young planter, who had lost all his money and come down in the world. The chap chummed with me, and was engaged to a girl who chucked him and returned his epistles. The affair preyed awfully on his mind—Rutnagherry is a lonely spot, and devilish depressing in the rains; so one morning I found that he had hanged himself with a stirrup-leather in the back verandah."

Yes, I could understand it.

"Then, when I was hunting through his boxes," resumed Walter, with shameless loquacity, "I discovered the love-letters and read them. The fellow had just served up his heart, red-hot, upon a sheet of note-paper! I copied out all the most telling bits, and sent them on to you. I'm no hand at composition, and he was an Oxford medallist, but they exactly expressed my sentiments—see?"

"Yes, indeed I do see—at last!" I cried passionately; "and better late than never."

"Ah, ha! there was the touch of the old Pam again. But, what can you do? No use getting into a rage. The noose matrimonial is round your dear little white throat. There is no reprieve; you cannot escape," he concluded, with a jarring laugh.

"I can, and I will," I retorted, as I sprang to my feet and began to walk about.

"But you have no money, my darling, not a friend in

the country"—following me, as I swept to and fro, with my hands behind me. "Lots of girls at home would jump at your chance. Think of it—India, and a husband!"

"English girls are not so desperate," I answered furiously.

"If you spoil Tizzie's little show, she will be nasty—infernally nasty. No, darling; you have burnt your boats—or was it boots? You cannot go back and face the *two* families. You dare not remain out here, a handsome penniless girl, without a roof to your head. You've got to go through with it—see?"

"No," I replied, turning on him fiercely. "When I say no, you may remember that I mean no."

"How can you help yourself?" There was a jeer in his voice.

"By the stirrup-leather, if the worst comes to the worst."

"Oh, I say! Come, come, Pam; go slow."

"And I am not without friends, even in India," I continued defiantly.

A long pause. This intelligence was evidently unexpected. He gaped at me in round-eyed incredulity. At last he began, in a kind of whimper—

"Listen to me quietly. For God's sake, don't throw me over. Marry me—yes, and save me from myself."

"Thank you, but I am anxious to save myself from *you*," I retorted.

"Oh, listen to me, Pam. Turn round and look at me, and stop walking to and fro; you are driving me mad. You know you could always do as you liked with me. *You* could keep it from me."

I stood still at last, and faced him gravely. So, that was it—he drank!

"I declare, when I saw your jolly old face in the group, I said, 'There's my guardian angel.' You were always so firm; you never changed your mind, or caved in. You won't go back on me, will you, Pam?" and tears actually streamed from his eyes.

"I won't go forward with you, that is certain. Why don't you take the pledge?"

"It's no use—not a little bit. When I sit there alone at night, listening to the rain pouring on the tin roof, and the water tearing down the mountain-sides, and look out and see nothing but a great white mist like wool, I feel that there is nothing for it but brandy. No pledge will bind me, but the hand of a pretty girl—your hand—would hold me back."

"No, I cannot do it," I replied; and I recalled the day when he had coaxed me to borrow a sovereign from our cook. I seemed to be repeating that self-same moment. "Watty, how dared you deceive me as you have done?"

"Pam, old girl"—he was now sobbing freely—"it is for you to save me; you always helped me. You are my last chance. Max has promised me a thousand rupees to pay my debts—so we may start fair. You are my only hope; if you desert me, I shall go to the devil—I know I shall!"

And he collapsed on the sofa, buried his head in his hands, and sobbed like a woman—no, it was ten times worse. This was awful; and so was the subsequent long silence, which was only broken by Watty's deep-drawn sobs.

"You cannot desert me. Think of my whole life!" he gasped at last.

"Think of mine," I retorted. "What claim have you on me? Not love—you don't love me. As for myself, I'd rather work among the crops for a copper a day, like the women of this country, than be your wife."

"Pam! you don't mean it, I know. Don't say it. I know I've been to blame——"

"You have been to blame, and your mother; but above all I blame myself," I interrupted. "I am romantic. I idealized you; I endowed you with good qualities, and stifled little memories of your indolence and shiftiness. Your false photograph and your false letters did the rest. You decoyed me out with the face of one and the intellect of another. You stole these, and pretended they were your own. Oh, what a thief!"

"Thief!"—struggling to his feet. "All's fair in love and war, and you may call me whatever you please. I did it for your sake. When I saw that your letters were just friendly and cool, and that I was getting no forrader, I sent you Max's photograph. 'Pon my soul, I meant no harm. He is like me, only better looking; I thought a flattering likeness would turn the scale and tempt you to say 'yes,' and you have said 'yes,' and I swear I'll hold you to it. You must marry me on Saturday. Think of the frightful row and the scandal, and Tizzie's expense—all for nothing. You don't know Tizzie; *she* won't let you off."

"Yes, she will," I rejoined, with much emphasis.

"Oh, will she? Wait till she talks to you;" and I fancied that I actually saw a gleam of malicious triumph in his eye.

"She will never talk me into marrying you, Watty," I answered stoutly.

"No; I'll do that myself," he cried, suddenly pressing closer to me. "Come now, Pam, there's a good girl, make it up. Don't be so obstinate; it's for your own advantage as much as my own. Here"—and he suddenly flung himself down on the rug and took fast hold of my dress—"see, I'm on my knees before you. I'm awfully sorry—I beg your pardon, and all that sort of thing. I can't say or do more, can I? Come, make it up; say something, Pam—say something."

"Yes, I will say something," I replied—"something once for all. I say good-bye!" and wrenching my dress out of his clutch, I escaped from the room; and the last impression I received of Watty Thorold, he was scrambling clumsily to his feet, with an accompaniment of breathless oaths.

I went straight into my own apartment. And what a scene it presented! Extended at full length lay my white satin gown, almost like a dead bride, with the wreath and veil on the pillow. Dulia, the ayah, had an eye for effect. From the four corners of the poles supporting the mosquito-curtains depended four smart green-and-white costumes. The bride was defunct, and the bridesmaids were no more. One table was covered with my best presents; the cane lounge displayed my best hats. I cleared a chair at last, and sat down. The twelve-o'clock gun had fired; Dulia, the ayah, had departed to her "khana," and I was alone. What would be the next scene? I had a little breathing-time in which to brace my nerves. How could I ever have supposed that easy-going lazy Watty would alter in six years? Can an Ethiopian change his skin, or a boy of twenty-one his disposition? Far from loving him, I now

loathed him, and the sudden and violent reaction seemed to throw me into a burning fever.

No, he was *not* up to the sample. I had made a fatal mistake—probably I had spoiled my life. At present, I must endeavour to keep my head clear, keep up my courage, and make a fresh start. There was a swish of skirts, a swish of haste and temper, and Tizzie entered. Now she was going to talk to me, as Watty had threatened.

"What is all this fuss?" she asked in a sharp key. "Watty has been in my little sanctum—he has drunk half a tumbler of raw whisky—he is completely overcome, and he declares that you absolutely refuse to marry him!" Here she came to a dead dramatic stop, and paused for a reply.

"Yes, I do refuse to marry him," I replied; and, sitting erect and tossing back my hair, I poured forth my story at white heat, almost like a stream of lava.

Tizzie stood motionless until I had quite concluded. She had listened with a curiously grave face; then she sat down, and said in an unexpectedly genial voice—

"I never was so puzzled in all my life as when I first saw you. When you rose to your feet and faced me, I nearly screamed. I felt that there was some awful muddle somewhere. Watty's sweetheart should be a little round-about giggling chit, devoted to chocolate and cheap scents. *You* look a patrician; you are accomplished; you could not giggle to save your life. I see Aunt Gussie's hand in the whole thing."

"Her hand!" I exclaimed. "But why?"

"Because—now I am about to tell you the truth," she began with an air of affectionate candour,—"Watty has been going to the bad steadily for a long time. We

are all ashamed of him; he is weak as water. He has been dismissed from post to post; Aunt Gussie had heard of his scrapes."

"What kind of scrapes?" I inquired, although they were nothing to me now.

"Oh, you know what men are," she rejoined, with a curl of her upper lip.

"No, I really do not," I answered, with simple truth.

"Well, he was mixed up with a conductor's daughter, a common girl, who got round him—such a dreadful, vulgar, bouncing creature!—he was even going to marry her; but Aunt Gussie heard of the business in time. She was frantic, and stopped it at once. In fact, she had a vague idea of coming out herself; but, after all, she sent you instead."

"I'm sure I ought to feel greatly honoured," I remarked stiffly.

"You see," resumed Tizzie, "Watty requires a strong hand over him. He has no self-control. A good firm wife would save him from drifting to ruin. She should be pretty and cheerful, and without home ties. Aunt Gussie looked about in despair, and then threw Watty a plank in the shape of Pamela Ferrars."

"Yes; and after all," I interrupted, "she turns out to be not a stout plank, but a broken reed."

"You have not arrived at that stage yet," protested Tizzie. "No, no; you are a long way from that, I trust. Honestly, Aunt Gussie has treated you shamefully, thrown dust in your eyes, and worked on your tender memories."

"They were not tender," I again interrupted,—"only friendly."

"Well, then, friendly. My aunt has deceived you, and so has Watty. It has been all scheming and self-interest, under the cloak of boy-and-girl attachment and dear old times. Aunt Gussie knew you were an orphan; you are young, pretty, clever, and, she said, cheerful."

"I can be cheerful—occasionally."

"You were the ideal wife for Watty—a wife to drag him out of the mire, and push him to the front. Many a man owes all his good fortune and promotion to a pretty and ambitious partner."

"Surely you don't accuse *me* of ambition?" I cried indignantly.

"No, I acquit you of that," she said coldly. "Yes, it has been a case of cruel and premeditated deceit; but now you are here, of course you must marry him. Yes," she continued, leaning her hand heavily on my knee; "your bridesmaids will arrive directly; the cake has travelled amazingly well; every one has accepted—indeed, some have sent presents; the archdeacon will perform the ceremony; and Max has promised to give you away. After all, it is no worse than a French marriage, and some of those turn out admirably. You know very well that you can mould Watty as you please." She paused, and then added, "Yes, and I promise you shall come down here for the race week—every cold weather. Come, now, be a sensible girl, and make the best of it."

"There is no best," I protested. "I have been a weak, sentimental fool. I've allowed myself to be influenced by my relations, who were anxious to be rid of me; by Mrs. Thorold, who had her own ends in view. You see where it has landed me. No, I will never be influenced again."

"And you won't take my advice—the advice of an elder sister?" she demanded, rather tremulously.

"No, thank you. You admit that Watty is weak, deceitful, and cowardly. Pray, how could I respect him?"

"Ah!"—in a sneering voice—"of course, you had a different ideal, but *he* is impossible."

"I am aware of that," I answered, with flaming cheeks; "but not more impossible than Walter."

"Well, my dear Miss Ferrars" (I was no longer Pamela), "I hope you will not do anything rash, or act in a hurry. May I ask your plans?" and her hostile eyes grew pitiless.

Yes, but what *were* my plans? My whole scheme of life had been utterly wrecked; I could not see the future.

"On the one hand," she glibly continued, "you will have a husband, well connected, and with a small but certain income; you have known him all his life, and under your influence he may rise; you will have your own settled, pretty home. And on the other hand, what is there?—nothing, but a friendless girl drifting about India."

"I will look for a situation at once."

"Ah, easier said than done. You may get a post as a nursery governess—twenty rupees a month, and your dhoby."

"Well, I can but try," I answered bravely.

"And so you have resolved to break off the match—your determination is fixed?"

"Yes, irrevocably fixed," I repeated.

"Very well, then"—rising from her chair, her voice also rising, her temper vibrating in her voice. "Then, I have

done with you. Here you come, upset all arrangements, cover me with mortification and ridicule, put me to vast expense—it's abominable! What am I to say to every one?" she almost shrieked. "Look at the dresses; think of the talk! What *is* to be said?"

"Say anything you please—say that I am an unsuitable match; lay all the blame on my shoulders," I responded impetuously.

"I certainly shall. This is Tuesday. We shall be compelled to go from home till the gossip subsides, to hide ourselves for a week or two; and I cannot ask you to remain."

"It was extremely kind of you to have harboured me at all, and I shall not encroach on your hospitality after to-morrow. I have a friend, a lady I came out with. I shall go to her at once. I think she will help me to earn my own living."

"Who is the woman?" she asked abruptly.

"Mrs. Evans; her husband is the Forest officer at Lohara."

"Miles—hundreds of miles from here; a jungly place! Well, you had better wire at once. I will tell the ayah to pack;" and she left me.

In less than five minutes the ayah appeared, looking rather sullen, for she had been disturbed at her meal. She knew all; I read it in her keen old eyes. She carried in one hand a telegraph form and a pencil; in the other a railway guide, with a leaf turned down. There was no doubt that, once she took an affair in hand, Tizzie did nothing by halves! What could be more complete than this prompt speeding of a parting guest?

CHAPTER XI

BEHIND THE CHICK

YES, I had received my marching orders; they were summary—I must depart at once; and but for Mrs. Evans, I was absolutely friendless. I sat down, time-table in hand, and hastily looked out my train; it left Bareda at seven o'clock in the morning. I then scribbled off a telegram, which was as brief as it was startling:

"*To* EVANS, LOHARA, C.P.

"*Mirpur Junction, Thursday, at 2 p.m. Please meet Pamela Ferrars.*"

This I handed to the ayah, with rupees to pay. She snatched at both, and ran out with amazing celerity; possibly a messenger was already in waiting. For my part, I was consumed by a feverish energy—a burning desire to "act, act in the living present." I was resolved not to think; there would be ample time for cool reflection during my journey of thirty-six hours, and I fell upon my belongings in a transport of haste, and set to work to collect and re-pack what had been unpacked but an hour previously. I am confident that Dulia ayah

will never forget *me!* Possibly she discourses of me in the Burra bazaar even unto this day. How could she fail to remember a young lady who went to bed in her best dinner-gown, who arrived as a bride elect, with all her gewgaws, cake, and trousseau, displayed them for a brief moment, and then hustled everything back to their respective boxes?—a bride who merely came to perch like a bird, and then to fly away? I hereby acknowledge and record that I found Dulia a capable and useful creature; her little cold brown hands were quick and trim. How rapidly and neatly she folded up and pressed down, and, during the short intervals when her head was not in a box, *how* she stared at me! Nor was I idle. At the end of two hours our joint labours were complete, and my luggage was once more strapped, locked, and labelled—this time to Mirpur Junction, B.N.R. I declined Dulia's civil offer to bring me my tiffin on a tray, precisely like a naughty child who has been banished from the society of her elders; but I was thankful to accept a glass of milk—which, with some biscuits I discovered in my travelling-bag, gave me the agreeable sensation of being a self-supporting guest. As soon as I had despatched these refreshments, and the ayah—who had doubtless been long hungering for her "khana" and her "huka"—I seated myself at the little writing-table and wrote an indignant letter to Mrs. Thorold. It was true—as I now, alas! learnt to my cost—that she never did anything without an object. She had countenanced, cajoled, and made use of me, and I was despatched as a sacrifice to her son; but I had seen the pitfall in time, and stepped aside. I also wrote to my aunt with a flowing pen, and drew her a distinct picture of my late *fiancé*. I assured her that nothing would

induce me to be his wife; that I would never again trespass on her kindness, for I hoped to earn my own living as governess or companion. India was a cheap country for those who had modest tastes. I had one friend in Mrs. Evans; I had also a good outfit, and nearly thirty pounds in English money. I returned all the presents to her address, and begged her to distribute these amongst their donors; and I added, that it was the last kind office I would ask her to undertake for me.

These letters, the closed trunks, the despatched telegram, afforded a deep relief to my mind; and as the afternoon advanced, I put on a loose dressing-gown, drew a long cane chair close to the open glass door, where (behind the chick) I could see without being seen, propped up my head with several soft cushions, and prepared to review my situation. It was certainly difficult to collect my wits and think out a question when the whole of my position had been cut from under my feet, and I was figuratively in mid-air. To whatever straits I was reduced, I would never marry Watty Thorold. No, I would sooner starve than be the wife of an ignoble wretch who had relaxed all hold of his self-respect, and looked to me to reclaim him. Watty had calmly—well, no, not calmly—demanded that my life should be devoted to his advantage, and yet —and yet, I had felt I was a horrible stony-hearted creature when he had wept and implored me to save him, precisely as if I had seen a man hurried along in the clutch of a rapid river, and had withheld my help and let him drown. Tizzie would be thankful to be rid of me, of course, since I had refused to undertake the charge of the family black sheep, and I had utterly spoiled her "show."

Happily, our paths in life were far apart; we were not likely to meet again. And the cousin, Maxwell Thorold? He would never, never know the real reason of the rupture between Watty and myself. Watty would keep my secret, in his own interests.

It was now between four and five o'clock, the air was warm and languorous, and from gazing out upon the yellow roses and the darting squirrels, my eyes gradually closed. I was so weary, so absolutely worn out with exhausting emotions and hard physical labour, that at last I fell fast asleep. After a time I passed into the land of dreams, and I dreamt that Tizzie and her cousin, Maxwell Thorold, were sitting outside in the verandah. They were discussing the recent events; they were talking of Watty and of me.

"This is a pretty business," Tizzie was saying, "and so like Watty."

"I cannot make it out," answered the family star. "He came over to my bungalow smelling strongly of spirits, and ranting and raving of his beautiful Pam. He was almost delirious, so I had him put to bed, with ice on his head—and there he is now."

"Oh, then you have not heard that his beautiful Pam absolutely refuses to marry him?"

A long whistle. "So, that's the trouble! I thought there might be a screw loose."

"Screw loose?" repeated Tizzie. "Candidly, Max, does she look like a girl who would marry Watty?"

"There is no accounting for a woman's tastes," replied the other coolly.

"Watty has behaved shamefully."

"That is nothing new," he retorted.

"Aunt Gussie schemed to entangle a daughter-in-law who had no grand ideas, no relations, and a strong will, who would keep Watty straight."

"Easier said than done!"

"In spite of Aunt Gussie's exertions and childhood's sunny memories, the girl hung back."

"I see. She brought her strong will to bear on Aunt Gussie instead of Walter; the poor woman was shelled by her allies' guns."

"Yes."

"And what lured the young lady forward, or rather *out*?"

"His amazingly brilliant and delightful letters."

There was a loud hearty laugh—an explosive shout, which brought me to my senses. I started up wide awake. It was no dream after all, no nightmare, but a frightful reality. I had been listening to every word of a real conversation, which was taking place a few yards from my open window. There from behind the chick I saw Tizzie reclining in a cane chair, and the little tin god in another; and it was his shout of derisive laughter which had brought me to my senses; my heart stopped, and then went on with a leap.

"Oh, I say, come!" he gasped at last.

"Yes," pursued Tizzie, "these letters, and his photograph. They reawakened her slumbering affections. Now she has arrived, she discovers that Watty enticed her with the stolen letters of one man and the stolen photograph of another."

"I see; and he believed that, once here, she was helpless—poverty and public opinion would bind her fast," cried Maxwell Thorold. "Oh, the scoundrel!"

"And just think how I've been let in," Tizzie whimpered.

"Nothing to the way she has been let in," he answered with emphasis. "What are her plans?"

"She has a friend in the Central Provinces, and leaves to-morrow, thank goodness!"

"And she declines either to marry or reform Watty! Wise young woman! Upon my word, I should feel ashamed to look Miss Ferrars in the face after the treatment she has received from my own kinsman—and he is nearly beside himself."

"Yes, for she is so much handsomer than he expected."

"And he is so much worse than she expected," retorted Mr. Thorold.

All this time I was standing in the middle of the room. I could not escape; two doors opened into the verandah, and the other into the drawing-room. Were I to rush out on the cousins in my flowing dressing-gown and flowing hair, would that improve matters? And yet I was that contemptible object, an eavesdropper! The glass doors were wide open, the walls were perforated for ventilation, and the voices were as distinct as if I were beside the speakers. The two voices were the only audible sound in that great bungalow, with its soft-footed servants and matted floors. There I remained as if rooted to the ground, pressing my hands to my hot face; all the blood in my body seemed to have rushed there; my very skin was scorching.

"What induced a girl of her type to contemplate becoming his wife?" resumed Maxwell.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder——"

"Of some one else," he interrupted ruthlessly.

"Well, Aunt Gussie's manœuvres—a miserable home, visions of liberty, and a captivating photograph."

"Oh, by the way, you have not told me whose face was the magnet that brought the girl all the way from England."

Would she tell him? Oh, would she be so cruel, so base? If I were to listen longer, I believe I should go mad. My brain was on fire; my heart was fluttering in my throat. I looked around me like some wild creature at bay. No, there was no escape—none. I rushed to the farthest corner of the room, and covered my ears with my hands, and I leant my head against the wall, gasping for breath.

I should die of shame,—and if I were to die, so much the better; surely my humiliation and misery had reached a climax. Was there the smallest, faintest, weakest chance that Tizzie would leave the untruth untold? As I stood pressing my fingers into my ears, and leaning my forehead against the chunam wall, I could not hear a sound. I seemed to have lost the grip of my own personality; my mind was a mist. How long I remained in this attitude I shall never know, but I was roused by my arm being roughly shaken. I gave a little stifled cry, turned about, and confronted the ayah. At first I am sure she thought I was insane; and who could wonder? But when I took my hands down and listened intently and looked towards the verandah, she grasped the position with the astuteness of her race.

"All done gone," she announced confidentially. "Thorold Sahib plenty angry—awful angry—gone. Mem Sahib send you this," and she tendered a little note. The gum on the flap of the envelope was not yet dried; it had

been despatched within the last three minutes. I tore it open, and read—

"DEAR MISS FERRARS,

"As I have no doubt that the sudden alteration of your plans will cause you some inconvenience, and as railway travelling is expensive in India, I beg to enclose two notes for one hundred rupees each.

"Yours faithfully,

"E. HASSALL.

"P.S.—Your train leaves at seven o'clock sharp."

I had a sickening conviction that these two notes for one hundred rupees were not the result of Tizzie's munificence, but were sent to me by her "generous" cousin. How thankful I felt that I did not need his donation! I had prudently reserved a portion of the money drawn for my outfit, with the intention of investing in a small piano, —and now this thirty pounds stood between me and the most cruel humiliation and the most abject want. Bad as was my plight, it might have been worse. There was a still lower depth to which I might have descended had I been compelled to accept *money* from the hands of Maxwell Thorold.

When I had mastered this stimulating letter, I went to the writing table, and wrote an answer, though my hand shook so much that I could only indite one word at a time; but at last I succeeded in finishing a clear, legible page, which said—

"DEAR MRS. HASSALL,

"I return enclosed the two notes for one hundred rupees you have kindly sent me, as I have ample funds

for my travelling expenses. I beg also to thank you for reminding me of the hour of departure to-morrow morning, and to reassure you of my punctuality.

"Yours truly,

"PAMELA FERRARS."

CHAPTER XII

WOODS AND FORESTS

FROM a large military station, with its martial parades, galloping squadrons, dashing equipages, and crowded thoroughfares, to a solitary encampment among the forests of Central India, is a change as sharp as passing suddenly from the roar of London into some remote and sequestered lane. The journey to Lohara proved to be a tedious and intricate business; and when I left the line of rail, I was met by Mr. Evans, a spare, elderly man, wearing an enormous sun topee and a patriarchal beard. However, between beard and topee, I distinguished a kindly face, and a pair of eyes that offered me a cordial welcome. Mr. Evans appeared to take my abrupt descent upon his household entirely as a matter of course, and assured me that his wife was looking forward to my arrival, and would have come to Mirpur herself, but that she was still rather knocked up from her recent journey.

"We have forty miles of bullock tonga," he explained, as he conducted me out of the little station. "You probably don't know what I am talking about; but there it is—the cow-cart!" and he indicated a two-wheeled vehicle with an immense white awning and a pole, on either side of which lay a large red bullock, comfortably chewing

the cud. These were immediately stirred up by their driver, we clambered into the front seat, my luggage was piled up behind, and in a few minutes' time, thanks to shouts and whip crackings, we were actually paddling out of the station at the rate of five miles an hour.

On the whole, I must confess that I enjoyed this expedition; the tonga was comfortable, if the pace was leisurely, and here was real India at last!—the primitive country, looking much as it had done for thousands of years; no bicycles or victorias flashed by, but we met lumbering carts with wooden wheels, all in one piece—like cheeses—people riding asses, or afoot, driving herds of sheep and goats, identical in appearance with the pictures in our old family Bible. We skirted large villages, and occasionally descried a gaudy idol daubed with scarlet paint, its overshadowing tree fluttering with rags, the offerings, I was informed, of devout travellers. Mr. Evans was deeply versed in the lore of his district, and I received a valuable object-lesson, as we soberly jogged along, in the names of the different plants and trees and birds. I could soon tell a tamarind from a sheshum, a peepul from a teak; and with anecdotes and little stories of the villages and "topes," rivers and temples, the time went by. My companion informed me that he had been a forest officer for nearly twenty years, that he was fond of his profession, of his children the trees, and his nurseries of tender saplings.

"What can you have to do?" I asked. "Don't all the forests get on very comfortably without us?"

"I know that we could not get on comfortably without *them*. What about the rainfall?" he asked; "and what about fuel? I have my hands full, as you will soon see. I prevent and stamp out fires. I look after

my nurseries of young trees; plant, fence, lop, and cut down. Many of my ancient oaks I am as much attached to as if they were personal friends, and it goes to my heart to give orders for an execution. We are six months in camp—we are in camp now. I hope you will not find it desperately dull."

"No, indeed," I replied; "I'm sure I shall find it a delightful novelty."

"You see, we have no society, beyond a few of the district officers; we never visit any of the gay centres—whenever we have leave, we go home. It is a lonely life, especially for my wife, and she will be thankful to have you for a companion."

It was kind of Mr. Evans to tell me this, and put me at my ease; but I had no intention of quartering myself upon these hospitable people for any length of time. Every five miles we halted at a village, and changed bullocks. The fresh pair were always in waiting, and their owners—strange, wild people of the Gond race—generally ran along with us like dogs, until we arrived at the next stage. It was nine o'clock in the evening when we reached our destination, which was on a plateau where several white tents gleamed out against a background of forest trees; a great fire of logs blazed in front of the encampment, ponies and cows were picketed around, and Mrs. Evans, in a ginger-coloured shawl, was standing by the roadside, awaiting us. As soon as we had exchanged greetings, she led me into a large hut, where a lamp burned brightly, and dinner was laid.

"Your quarters are here," she said, raising a padded flap, and preceding me into another tent. It looked quite home-like; the walls were lined with orange cotton,

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gay-striped dhurries were laid on the ground; there was a camp-bed, a dressing-table, cane chairs, and a bunch of exquisite forest flowers.

"You are heartily welcome," she said. "You know what your company will be to me," and she kissed me warmly.

"It seems years since we parted," I replied, hugging her, "years and years."

"Only five days ago; but you have probably compressed the experiences of years into these five days. Now, get ready for dinner—camp fare—and to-morrow you and I will have a good talk."

Our camp fare proved to be excellent; and after dinner we sat outside, around the fire, in comfortable armchairs.

"This is our drawing-room," explained Mrs. Evans, as we sipped our coffee. "We go to bed at nine o'clock to the minute, for Robbie is at work at six. We keep almost the same hours as the birds."

For my own part, I was ready to retire at once. A night and day in the train, and a forty-mile tonga drive, had left me unusually fatigued. I do not think I ever rested so well as in that little white bed in the tent. I felt, as I curled myself up to sleep, that at last I was in a safe nest. All my fears and responsibilities had vanished, since I was once more under Mrs. Evans's strong, sheltering wing. It seemed almost impossible that morning could have arrived, when I heard a stir in the camp—voices—saw the light under the chick, and felt the cool, stimulating fresh air. Any one who has ever lived in a camp can testify to the delightfully fresh sensation of sleeping under canvas.

Breakfast, or chotah hazree, was soon despatched; and when Mr. Evans had ridden off, followed by his chuprassis,

Mrs. Evans and I strolled round the camp, fed her white pony, had a word with the dogs and the parrot, and then settled down together under the verandah of the big tent. She brought out some sewing, which I shared; and as we talked, our needles flew. In the first place, I related my recent experiences. "Perhaps I had been hasty and abrupt, but I could not marry Watty," I concluded at last.

"My dear, you did well," she said. "A woman has a right to her own happiness. You would have been miserable had you married Watty, a creature so ignoble, so cunning, so unscrupulous. I am afraid he has not one good quality, as far as I can gather; and the other man, what of him?" and she leant her chin on her hand and looked at me steadily.

"Oh, I only met him for a moment, and in that moment I saw the difference. He is older than Watty. His eyes are dark, and Watty's are very light."

"Yes; eyes don't come out in a photograph. Robbie knows Mr. Thorold by name. He is one of the rising civilians. They say he will go far."

"Far from me, I hope," I exclaimed. "I pray that our paths may never cross again."

"Do you think he guessed?" she asked, after a short silence.

"No; but I am afraid he knows." I put my hands up to my face. "I overheard part of a conversation. I could not help myself."

"Yes; these bungalows, with their wide rooms, all open doors, are treacherous to secrets. No wonder that every one's affairs are the talk of the bazaar. Well, my child, you have had a peculiar experience, and I am glad you had the strength of mind to break off your marriage. It

is not every girl who would have dared to do so, and rely solely on herself."

"I think most girls would have done the same," I argued.

"Perhaps! I have associated with several 'stray' girls, as I may call them, coming and going to England. You know, I am an old sailor. I have made the trip to and fro no less than twelve times. What with taking the children to school, and going home to visit them, and going home sick, I have seen a good deal of life on the ocean wave; I have witnessed many comedies and one or two tragedies during the last eighteen years."

"What were the tragedies? You don't mean real ones?" I faltered.

"You shall judge for yourself. About five years ago we came out in a very full ship, and there were no fewer than six brides elect on board. Among these there was a girl, a dainty little wisp of a thing, with big blue eyes, who somehow always recalled a blue butterfly. She had not seen her *fiancé* for some time, and was one of a large and impecunious family, so she informed me, for she sat near me at table. She was an impulsive, loquacious creature, and a born coquette, who had never as yet had much field for her operations. She began a flirtation with one of the ship's officers—an extremely good-looking fellow—before we were clear of the Thames, and lost her heart to him, and he to her. By the time we reached Malta, I am sure she would gladly have abandoned her *fiancé* in his favour; and by the time we anchored at Aden, their attachment was palpable to all on board. Oh, those moonlight nights in the Indian Ocean were a paradise for lovers! and by the time we anchored in Bombay we fully expected a climax. Unfortunately, the young man had

no money, he could not afford to marry, and he had no alternative but to bid her good-bye, and implore her to forget him. I was in the saloon. I witnessed the agonized parting, and I shall never forget the girl's miserable face, nor her look of stony horror, when her future husband—a corpulent, red-bearded man in spectacles—came to meet her and greet her. We attended a wedding next morning in the cathedral—one of the brides was a connection of Robbie's—and I met the poor little butterfly coming down the aisle. She had just been married, and was leaning on the arm of her middle-aged spouse. She looked like the bride of Death. I declare, her marble face has haunted me ever since."

"Poor girl!" I exclaimed. "Yes; I suppose it was a tragedy. I wonder what has become of her?"

"She is dead," she answered quietly,—"dead quite a long time."

"And the other tragedy?"

"That was on the passage home. She was a beautiful, tall, silent girl, in charge of the captain, and had, I gathered, come down alone from the Punjab. Any one could see that she was in great trouble; her sad, dark eyes told a tale. She was miserable at leaving India, and each day we sailed farther west her spirits seemed to sink one degree lower. I endeavoured to cheer her up—I was almost the only one she spoke to; and she used to come and sit beside me for hours, without once opening her lips, her tragic gaze fixed steadily on the horizon—the Eastern horizon.

"'You regret India, I can see,' I said to her one day.

"'Oh, yes; I regret India,' she answered, with passionate emphasis. 'I hope my soul will go there when I die.'

"'She is a strange girl, that young lady,' remarked the captain to me; he and I were old acquaintances. 'She has such a morbid curiosity about sharks, always inquiring if they are in the sea. First of all it was the Indian Ocean, then the Red Sea—I can't understand it. Now we are in the Mediterranean, I told her they were scarce.'

"It soon appeared that the wretched girl had a reason for her questions. That evening she was missing. She was inquired for at tea-time, and some one said they had seen her in the music-room just before dark. We carried a sweet singer on board, a lady with the most exquisite and sympathetic voice, who confessed that she had been surprised by the silent girl coming over and asking her to sing that hackneyed old song, 'Douglas Gordon;' and she sang it, apparently, with her usual charm, for she noticed large tears streaming down her listener's face as she thanked her and went away."

"Went away?" I repeated. "Where?"

"She was never seen again. She had evidently thrown herself overboard, and, like Douglas Gordon, 'was drowned in the sea.'"

"Oh, how dreadful! I suppose she was insane?"

"I don't know. I believe she was mad with the pain of some recent grief, poor soul! but what it was I could not guess."

"Love," I suggested briefly.

"Probably. Many of the most difficult and painful problems of life are due to love."

"And so she cut the knot!" I exclaimed. "Poor stray girl! And here am I, another stray girl, waiting to see what fortune will fling at my head."

"Forture is a fickle jade," remarked Mrs. Evans. "And

yet, how every one worships her! The ancients built magnificent temples in her honour. My Hindoo servants offer up a cock or a kid whenever they desire some favour."

"And how unreal it sounds!" I said. "Here are you and I, modern women, dressed in modern nineteenth-century clothes, surrounded with new novels and papers and magazines which left London but three weeks ago; yet the people that wait on us offer up sacrifices to idols—precisely as they did in the days of Moses!"

"That is quite true. But, my dear Pamela, I know several Europeans who worship the golden calf. Do not you?"

"Yes," I assented. And my thoughts flew to Linda, who made no secret of her reverence for some enormously rich neighbours.

"Who can wonder?" continued Mrs. Evans. "Is not wealth, at present, the accepted symbol of happiness?"

"I suppose it is," I rejoined; "but I do not believe it brings happiness, and I should not care to be immensely rich. How absurd it sounds for me to say so!" I confessed, with a laugh. "I do not think I need feel the least alarm at the prospect of becoming wealthy. On the contrary, my anxiety points to the opposite direction, and I sincerely hope that I may not find myself some day penniless! And now, dear Mrs. Evans," I continued after a pause, during which I had threaded my needle, "I want to get a situation as soon as possible, and I am hoping that you will recommend me. I can——"

"You can remain here, my dear," she interrupted quickly —"at any rate, for some time. I want you. I feel that the

voyage and journey have tried me, and I shall be thankful to have you with me. You will soon see that I am alone nearly all day, for it tires me to ride with Robbie as I used to do. My sight, too, is failing, and I can only sit here and sew and think, or go for a little stroll. Robbie must do his work. 'Men must work, and women must weep.' Ah, you never heard that song—but I shall not weep when I have you to cheer me."

"I should like to stay with you better than anything, but I have only thirty pounds in the world."

"And that would not pay your passage second-class," she answered. "By-and-by you might take a nice place as companion to a lady. Save your salary, see something of India, and go home when the storm has blown over."

Yes; the plan sounded pleasant and feasible.

"I believe I could easily find you something now—and will, if you tire of us; but I am greedy—I wish to keep you for myself. I am afraid I am selfish. Still, you can have a rest here, which will do you no harm. Robbie will teach you Hindustani, and you shall ride old Snow, my pony, and learn to be a Forest lady. Make up your mind, my dear, to remain with us for at least till next cold weather."

And there and then I agreed to remain with my good friends until the autumn. I must confess that the months I spent in the forest and jungle were the happiest I had known for years. I learnt Hindustani from Mr. Evans; I rode Snow, the pony; and the days, far from being dull, seemed only too short. I read aloud to Mrs. Evans, I wrote some letters, I sewed, I played chess with her, I undertook the housekeeping as far as possible. Once a week we moved our camp—a delightful manner

of changing one's surroundings and shifting our sky. I revelled in this novel, free life, and I fell into the daily routine as if it had been my lot for years. Mrs. Evans used to burst into peals of good-humoured laughter when she heard me volubly haranguing the domestics in what I believed to be pure "Urdu."

"Never mind, dear," she would say. "It is marvellous —no, I don't mean your grammar, but the facility with which you have picked up the language. It may come in useful some day."

Prophetic words! My sunny, happy life had experienced one or two checks. These came by the dâk runner, who fled along through the glades and paths, carrying his letter-bag, with tinkling bells to keep off wild animals. This half-clothed Tappal brought me a terrible letter from Aunt Lucy, announcing that I had disgraced the family, and assuring me that she would never forgive me. In other words, I was not to hope for shelter under her roof—this much I comprehended—as well as the fact that her anxiety lest I should reappear was distressing and painful.

I also had an epistle from Mrs. Thorold—sheets upon sheets of plain speaking that made my ears tingle and my cheeks burn. Who, she demanded, was I, that I dared put such an affront upon her family? At any rate, she had the satisfaction of assuring me that my name was a byword at home and abroad, that I had made myself disagreeably notorious in both Beverly and Bareda, that I should live to rue the day I had renounced Walter, and that my own relations entirely shared her views.

I must confess that I wept over these letters. But Mrs. Evans scolded me sharply, forcibly took them from me, and burnt them before my eyes in the camp fire.

"I fully agree with the native superstition," she confessed: "it is unlucky to keep bad news, or such things as bring trouble. You will only be brooding over these —forget them. At your age, troubles soon pass."

Unhappily, my next trouble came from Mrs. Evans herself.

CHAPTER XIII

A VOICE IN THE TWILIGHT

It is not to be supposed that, because we lived a sylvan, gipsy life among the woodlands of the Central Provinces, our days were dull and monotonous—quite the reverse; and we had our moments of supreme excitement like other people. Once they took the shape of a raging forest fire, happily extinguished, and once we experienced a grand tiger scare. We were sitting outside the tents by moonlight—our camp was pitched not far from a river,—and in the still silence which nightfall brings to the jungle we distinctly heard the bark of a deer in the crops, a sure signal of the presence of a tiger; and in a few minutes came his hoarse "wouff! wouff!" Mr. Evans instantly ran in search of his express rifle, and took up his quarters in a tree commanding the camp, where he remained till dawn. Mrs. Evans and I refused to go to bed for hours, the occasion was so uncommon and so thrilling, and yet not *too* alarming—for there was not the slightest fear that the tiger would venture among the tents, though he might dare to carry off a cow, or even the white pony. There in the morning, in the yellow sand by the river, among the tracks of hyena, sambur, and wild pig, were the marks of his pugs, yes—and of

some dark-brown stain like blood. His Highness had come to slake his thirst—and had found his supper. Mr. Evans had killed a number of tigers, but otherwise he did not care for sport. He told me that so many deer got away wounded, and died miserably in lingering torture, that he had given it up. Once, a week after he had been out with a party, he came across a stag with a broken leg one mass of gangrene, and he vowed then and there, after putting the animal out of its misery, that his shikari-days were done.

We enjoyed a certain amount of society, amazing as it may seem—not merely district officers of the public works and police department out "in camp" like Mr. Evans, or missionary folk who laboured among the Gonds, but we entertained other visitors in large numbers. We generally contrived to pitch our tents within easy reach of a village, in order to be able to procure the few necessaries required by our jungle *chef*,—for instance, ghee, attar, vegetables, and eggs. Our fowls marched with us. Among these villagers the "Forest Lady," who had come among them annually for so many years, was well known. As soon as we were established they flocked to welcome us, bringing their children and grandchildren and offerings of flowers and fruit. Mrs. Evans appeared to know all about them, and addressed many by name. Evidently she possessed a royal memory, and was familiar with their family affairs, their feuds, grievances, triumphs, hopes, and ailments. She was never without a supply of simple medicines, and set up a small dispensary at each halting-place, where she saw patients daily and administered advice and drugs. What cases came to her for relief!—some with elephantiasis or leprosy, others who had been mauled by

bears or leopards, and crowds of little children suffering from every infantile ailment,—and with these the Forest Lady was especially successful. She spoke the outlandish Gond tongue, entered into the women's interests, endowed them with small gifts—such as gay cotton jackets and petticoats for the girls, and little velvet skull-caps, manufactured from scraps, for the boys. The delight of the mothers and the pride of the children were exorbitant interest for our small outlay of time and needlework. She also distributed pictures, and a few penny toys. I have seen an anatomical toy, bought in Piccadilly for one penny, throw a whole village into ecstasies of delight. The parents were as easily amused as the children, and one and all were devoted to the gracious Forest Lady. Seated in a camp-chair, under a majestic peepal tree, arrayed in her old ginger shawl, Mrs. Evans, surrounded by villagers, looked like a great queen receiving the homage of her subjects. What a contrast there was between her and Tizzie Hassall!—one such a complete woman of the world, the other a sovereign in the jungle.

The hot weather was drawing near, when we should have to abandon life in tents and seek the shelter of a bungalow. The ground was parched and cracked, the river-beds had shrunk, leaves were shrivelling in the scorching hot winds, and the "coppersmith" and the "brain-fever" bird were indefatigable. It was time to fold up our tents and settle down in the little out-of-the-way station which represented to the Evanses their headquarters and their home. Lohara was situated on an elevated ridge, surrounded by stretches of grain and pasture, and overlooking a sea of forests. Three or four thatched buildings, a tiny tin church, a bazaar, a great Hindoo temple,

a tank, and a tennis-ground comprised "the Station." The Forest officer's bungalow was embowered with creepers, and stood in a garden which, though somewhat "jungly," was dignified by the presence of a splendid tamarind tree, under whose shade we used to sit when the heat of the day had abated. The house was small and simply furnished, but the whitewashed walls were lined with book-cases—there were books everywhere. In the purchase of books, and rushing home to see their children, was the channel through which the Evanses lavished their spare money. Mrs. Evans's wardrobe was slender and shabby, and she possessed little jewelry; but she despatched liberal orders to Thackers' in Bombay, was well abreast of the literature of the time, and "took in" numerous papers and all the heavy magazines. The sight of such a library was an unexpected joy, though many of the volumes were "caviare" to me. I ran my eye greedily along the shelves in my bedroom, and confess I was dismayed to see Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," Darwin's "Earth-worms," "The Apostolic Fathers," and the "Sakoon-tala." Well, there was "Ivanhoe," at any rate, "Alice in Wonderland," and "Esmond;" so I should not starve.

During May and June the weather was oppressive, the hot winds blew as if out of the mouth of a furnace. From seven o'clock in the morning till after sundown we remained indoors in semi-darkness; but my eyes were young, I sewed or read aloud to Mr. and Mrs. Evans, or we played chess and backgammon. He had office business daily, the interviewing of peons, writers, and underlings, and twice he was absent on a tiger-shooting expedition.

On one of these occasions, when Mrs. Evans and I were

alone, I had been reading a new novel to her. I came to a full stop, believing her to be asleep, as her eyes were closed. How worn and exhausted she looked! I had never realized, till now, how wasted and altered she had become since the day we had first talked together, five months previously. Was it merely the hot weather, or what? Suddenly she opened her eyes and met my pensive gaze, and said, with a smile—

"No, I'm not asleep; I've been listening most attentively. I believe the man is working up for a bad ending! When an author puts a favourite character to death in the last page, I always feel inclined to call for the police."

I laughed and said, "Well, shall I send round to the Thanah, for death is surely coming?"

"Yes," she repeated, "death is surely coming. Pamela," she continued, "do you believe in presentiments?"

"No," I answered, rather startled by her tone. "But why do you ask?"

"Because I have a firm impression, which I cannot shake off, that I shall never go home. No! I shall never rumble down the great trunk-road, bound for Mirpur Junction; you will all go away and leave me in the little graveyard here, lying beside the missionary's pretty daughter."

"We shall not do anything of the sort," I retorted sharply. "Please don't say such horrid things! Being shut up all day under the punkah, with nothing to do, gives one grim ideas—it's just the hot weather and the 'brain-fever' bird! Come, let us have a game of bézique till tea-time; Mrs. Connor, the missionary's wife, is coming over."

"Then, it must be chess; she does not like to see cards. And so you scoff at presentiments?"

"I thought you were an enlightened, highly educated woman!" I returned playfully.

"Am I? I ought to be. Well, I am prepared. If anything should happen, I have left a few directions in my writing-case—and I have not forgotten you, my dear. I have made inquiries, and a friend of mine in Poonah, Mrs. Berners, will receive you and put you in the way of a nice situation. It seems as if Providence had sent you to be a comfort to me; your companionship has been a wonderful boon to us both, and, if my presentiment comes true, you will be a pillar of strength to Robbie. Won't you? Promise!" and she looked at me with anxious eyes.

"I will promise anything and everything, if you will only promise me to put this gloomy idea out of your head."

"Very well, then, I will do my best;" and she held out her hand. "It is agreed."

Apparently Mrs. Evans succeeded in banishing her gloomy forebodings, and, at any rate, never referred to them again. The monsoon had broken with tremendous force. It had come with black darkness, a swift, chill wind, forked flashes followed by crashes which made the ground tremble, then more weird illumination which showed torrents of rain and water glistening everywhere. And oh! how welcome was the smell of the damp earth, the splashing of spouts, the sprouting of greenery, even the croaking of the frogs.

The hot weather was over at last! Man and beast were alike released, and no longer oppressed by the brooding silence of a brazen sky. Mrs. Evans picked up her spirits immediately; she revived as miraculously as one of her own half-dead geraniums, and we both took very heartily

to gardening, and I to tennis. When I ventured to hint at my impending departure, I was curtly silenced by the words of my bond.

"Next cold weather was the agreement. This is not the cold weather," she protested; "time enough to make plans at Christmas—if then. As far as we are concerned, we should prefer you to remain with us altogether."

"I only wish I could," I replied. "But I have a presentiment"—and I laughed in her face—"that your own daughter will be arriving, and I must really make a start and learn to be no longer a petted guest, but a hard-working governess."

My presentiment came to nothing, but with Mrs. Evans's foreboding it was otherwise.

The delicious month of October had commenced, and we were arranging for a trip to what we called "the plains." Mr. Evans had launched out into another pony; Mrs. Evans had despatched an extravagant order to Thackers', and we were full of energy and plans. It was tennis-day and mail-day. I returned from a really exciting set, with my shoes in my hand, my bat over my shoulder, to discover Mrs. Evans seated under the tamarind tree fast asleep. The dâk had come in, papers were piled on the wicker table, letters were unopened—excepting one in her lap—a letter with a black border.

I was struck, as I looked at her white, still face, with a frightful idea. I put my hand on hers to rouse her. Was she asleep? I spoke to her; I shook her arm—it felt extraordinarily stiff and rigid. Was this the sleep that knows no waking? Alas, it was!

I was so utterly shocked that, for some moments, I could neither speak nor move! At last I summoned the

servants, and she was borne into the bungalow. The apothecary arrived in breathless haste, but merely to assure me that Mrs. Evans had been dead for an hour. The letter in her hand announced to her husband (who was absent) that their youngest boy, Aubrey, had fallen out of a window, and had been killed on the spot; and the sudden news had killed his mother. I shall remember that awful day as long as I live. I am convinced that, in a few hours, I virtually became years older. I was obliged to break the terrible news of two deaths to Mr. Evans, when he rode home that evening full of charming schemes and jungle news. I really believe that, when I endeavoured to hint at his loss, he thought that I had had a touch of the sun; and yet, where was she—ever the first to welcome him? Presently I guided him to where she lay with folded hands and surrounded by white flowers. She looked beautiful, serene, and happy—no longer what she had termed herself, "a mere wreck." Under the double blow Mr. Evans was almost prostrate, and it fell to my lot to make all arrangements connected with the occasion: to send telegrams, receive sympathizers, and to write letters.

The funeral took place the following morning. Mrs. Evans was laid beside the missionary's daughter, the missionary himself read the service, and an enormous concourse of natives assembled (as if summoned by some magic wand) in order to see the Forest Lady pass to her last home. There she was laid, as she had predicted, and there we left her alone. Mr. Evans was compelled to return to England at once; for my part, I had discovered her written instructions. (There was a thought for every one—letters for Milly, Jack, Mr. Evans, for me; but,

strange to say, not a line for Aubrey, her special darling. Was this another presentiment?) I found the address of Mrs. Berners, the lady who lived at Poonah, and wired to her; she replied, inviting me to come immediately; and I resolved to set out as soon as I had despatched Mr. Evans to England. It was my task to pack, to store the furniture, dismiss the servants; it was my hand that broke up and scattered the little home. No wonder I felt about fifty years of age, and a grave, sad, responsible individual! It had been enjoined in Mrs. Evans's directions that Mary Ann, the ayah, who had been years in her service, was to accompany me as far as Poonah—Poonah being on the direct line to her native town, Madras.

Yes; Mary Ann was returning heartbroken to her own people. She was a pretty, middle-aged Madrassi, who wore the picturesque saree and black chignon peculiar to her race, and was a Roman Catholic, as was her mother before her. Between us we made all preparations, and I wrote to Mrs. Evans's Poonah friend, Mrs. Berners, and fixed the date of my arrival. First of all, I saw Mr. Evans off on his way to England. He was going north, I was bound for the south; and we parted with mutual regrets and promises of letters. Then Mary Ann and I got into our tonga, and the bullocks soon carried us away. We passed down a steep ghât into the great Jubbulpore trunk-road, and we had a dâk of ninety miles, before we could strike, at Dassi, the railway line that would transport us to Poonah. This dâk was a two-days' journey—indeed, it promised to be longer. Sometimes no fresh bullocks were to be obtained, and we were delayed for hours. At night we halted at travellers'

bungalows. These rest-houses were Government property, and were situated within easy reach of the thoroughfares. The first stood in an orange grove; it was red-roofed and cheery, and behind it waved a sea of yellow grain. The one where we passed the second night was overhung by trees, and close to a picturesque river, infested with rats—large, bold rats which ran along the punkah ropes, and inspired me with horror. On the evening of the third day we were still forty miles from our destination, for the difficulty of obtaining bullocks had been unparalleled, and now we arrived with a weary, worn-out pair which had done two stages—the last at a crawl, for no one knows his own limitations better than a dâk Byle!

The ayah had complained of a "plenty" bad headache and fever, and she and I were truly thankful when our cattle at last laboured up to a neat, white bungalow, standing back from the highway, amidst a clump of feathery bamboos. Amazing to relate, there was no one about the cook-house, and no Khansamah to welcome us. In vain we called aloud, in a coaxing key—"Khansamahah-Jee! Oh, Khansamahah-Jee!" No reply. "He must be in the bazaar," proclaimed our Byle-wallah. We thereupon descended and ordered our baggage to be carried into the empty verandah. This accomplished, our driver—he was one of Mr. Evans's servants—unyoked and turned loose the bullocks, and departed to light his fire and cook his simple meal. As the ayah complained incessantly of her head and of fever, I made her up a bed on one of the charpoys, covered her with a rug, and then sallied forth to look for the servants. The cook-house was empty; there was not even a stray chicken

innocently awaiting its hasty doom. I turned away from the bungalow into a narrow footpath, and made for the bazaar. (A bazaar is invariably the pendant of a travellers' rest-house.) I soon discovered a considerable village, but it appeared to be a village of the dead; the long double row of shops and houses were vacant, and most of them were roofless. Some had enormous holes knocked in their walls. Everywhere was the smell of some pungent, powerful disinfectant. There was not a soul, not even an animal, to be seen.

The sun had been low when we reached our journey's end, sinking to rest behind a sea of crimson and gold, with the magic tints of an Indian afterglow; and now one deep red line was all that glimmered in the west. As I stood transfixed by the well-curb, staring and marvelling, the dusk suddenly descended, swift as a curtain, and, in another moment, I realized that I was alone in this ghostly bazaar, and in the dark. I turned to retrace my steps at once, but it was a considerable time before I stumbled upon the footpath that led up to the bungalow. However, I struck into it at last, and I had almost reached the little avenue between the bamboos, when I caught the sound of a horse's hoofs; they were following me rapidly.

I immediately stood still and waited. In a few seconds the figure of a man on a pony loomed out of the background, and I challenged him boldly.

"Where are the people of this bungalow and of yonder bazaar, oh man?" I called in Hindustani. "What hath befallen?"

And out of the darkness a voice replied, in English, "*It is the plague!*"

CHAPTER XIV

THE PLAGUE CAMP

"THE plague!" I stammered in answer to this appalling announcement.

Now I understood the reason why bullocks were scarce, why for the last ten miles of the journey we had hardly met a soul, and why the little straw huts we had passed, had given me the impression that their owners were absent or asleep.

"I noticed your tonga coming along," explained the stranger, dismounting as he spoke, "and I galloped over as hard as I could to warn you not to stop."

"It was very good of you to trouble, and I shall be thankful for your help," I replied, as we walked along side by side to where the white pillars of the bungalow glimmered faintly through the darkness. "My ayah and I are travelling down to Dassi Station. We have come here to put up for the night; but there is not a soul in the place, and no light. I have called and searched. Even our bullock-driver has disappeared."

"Well, here we are," he declared, as we came to the foot of the steps.

The bungalow behind the verandah loomed black as a

cavern, and the only sound to be heard was the ayah's harrowing moans.

"She has been complaining all day," I explained, as we mounted the steps. "She has fever."

I felt a sudden cold shudder. A shivering suspicion whispered, "Could it be the plague?"

"All right, I'll get a light at once," said the stranger, a gentleman by his voice. "I know my way about here, and I think I can lay hands on the lamp. I have some matches."

Presently I heard the man groping and knocking about crockery in the next room and striking frantic matches. In another moment he had reappeared, carrying a small hurricane lamp, which he set down on the table between us. Then he looked across at me, and I at him; my heart gave a throb of agonized recognition; it was Mr. Thorold! For about two seconds he stared at me steadily, as if discrediting the evidence of his eyes.

"Miss Ferrars, as I live!" he ejaculated, half under his breath; and then, in a louder tone, added, "And *what*, in God's name, has brought you here?"

"I am travelling from Lohara to Dassi by dâk," I began tremulously, for I found really great difficulty in bringing out the words, since, for a moment, my very breath had left me. "I am going to a situation in Poonah."

"You could not have travelled this road at a worse time," he said; "the plague is raging. I don't mind telling you the solemn, ghastly truth, for I know you have strong nerves."

What did he mean to imply? Was there any barb in this speech? Well, there was not time to extract it now!

"We will leave the first thing in the morning, if we can get bullocks," I answered humbly,—"our pair are nearly dead,—and if you could only procure me a little milk for the ayah; she is so ill."

"Ill!" he repeated, snatching up the lamp by its handle. "Let me have a look at her."

He went over to the bedstead, held the light aloft, and stared at her fixedly. She blinked at the glare, and moaned, "Sahib—I very seek—I going die." Her eyes had a frightened expression, and her voice was thick and indistinct. Mr. Thorold felt her hot hand, and then her pulse, as gravely as if he were a professional.

"Cheer up, Ayah-jee," he said in Hindustani. Then he walked back to the stable, set down the lamp between us, and shook his head significantly.

"It's a case!" he announced in a low voice.

"How can you tell?—you are not a doctor."

"No; but I'm a pretty good judge. You see, I am the officer in charge of the plague camp."

I stared at him helplessly.

"Why do you look so surprised?" he inquired.

"I thought you were an Indian civilian."

"So I am; but we must all put our shoulders to the wheel—it's not entirely beer and skittles. This district has been decimated—in fact, nearly wiped out—and my department has what is termed 'lent me' for the occasion."

"Have you—many cases?" I faltered.

"Don't ask me; but we are better than we were. Still, we are terribly short-handed. One of our apothecaries is down now, and our lady nurse died on Monday." He looked over at the ayah, and then back at me, and continued, "I shall get her away at once, and send for a

dhoolie. If you can spare your tonga-man, I'll despatch him with a chit now;" and he took out a pocket-book and pencil and began to scribble.

"I should like to get you off to-night," he added, as he straightened himself, "if it were only two or three miles. Surely your bullocks could crawl so far?"

I made no answer, but took the chit out of his hand and went out and called into the night, "Golab Sing! Golab Sing! oh, Golab Sing!" But no answer came, beyond a scream from a nightjar.

"Allow me," said Mr. Thorold. "I'll go and rout him up. On second thoughts, I'll take the message myself. I'll get your tonga round, and as soon as we have moved the ayah, and you've had some food, you must start. Yes, it seems a harsh, tyrannical order, sending you in the night all alone; but there are urgent reasons why you should not remain here, and I know you are a brave girl."

As he concluded, he searched out and lit a piece of candle which he stuck in a bottle, and, snatching up a lamp, hurried away. I sat down wearily beside the table, and waited for what appeared an interminable time, but may have been about twenty minutes. At the end of this, Mr. Thorold reappeared, somewhat out of breath, and said—

"Your fellow must have suspected, or heard a whisper. He has bolted, and, what's worse, he has gone off with the bullocks and tonga—and I've no means of giving him chase. This *is* a pretty business!" he continued, putting down the lamp and looking at me reflectively. "I can manage about the ayah all right; I met a camp coolie and sent him with a message; but I've not an idea what to do with you."

"I won't remain here alone," I answered firmly.

"No, you won't. This bungalow is unsafe."

"I wasn't thinking of infection," I replied,—"I'm not afraid of that,—but I *am* afraid of rats. Are you quite certain that the Byle-wallah has run away? He is one of Mr. Evans's servants, and most trustworthy and honest."

"Honest! but he has stolen a tonga and bullocks! Even the most trustworthy servant will flee from plague or cholera—and that at an instant's warning. There is his fire still smouldering. He must have gone off to the bazaar to get attar and flour. A whisper, half a glance, would be sufficient to tell him what it meant; and he returned without a word to you, and fled with the tonga. That is the serious part of the whole business. How are you to get on to Dassi? You cannot stay here."

"No; and yet I cannot get away. It is a puzzle."

"I must confess that I am surprised your friends made no inquiries before starting you down here."

"They were the kindest people in the world," I rejoined warmly. "Mrs. Evans died a week ago; her husband has gone home; yet, in all his trouble, he did think of me, and sent the ayah, and his own driver and tonga, to accompany me."

"And the ayah, poor wretch, has the plague; and the driver has run away. Were you long with these people?"

"Ten months. Ever since——" I paused; I felt my cheeks blaze.

"Ever since I last saw you," he continued imperturbably.

"I will tell you what to do with me," I said suddenly. "Take me to your camp, and give me the vacant post of nurse."

"It is a very plucky offer, I must say; but of course your suggestion is impossible."

"Well, at any rate, I claim to nurse the ayah. She belongs to me, and Europeans—so the papers say—do not take the infection, and——"

"Miss Smith was a European," he interrupted—"an English girl like yourself."

"A thunderbolt never falls twice in the same spot," I answered recklessly. "I mean to take Miss Smith's place; I am young, strong, willing, and I can nurse."

"And you can take the plague," he added grimly. "No, I will not accept the responsibility; you must go,"—and his voice assumed a tone that was almost a command.

"Others do not take the plague—yourself, for instance," I argued, with a fair degree of calmness.

He turned and looked squarely at me. "Miss Ferrars, you do not realize what you are asking. You have no idea of the hideous scenes you will see, the incessant labours, the strain on your nervous system, and the anxiety. You are not accustomed to horrors. No; there is no more to be said," he concluded, disposing of me as summarily as a schoolmaster puts a pupil in his place.

"What other people are called upon to endure I shall certainly not flinch from witnessing. Here is my opportunity of doing some good, of being useful, of being wanted."

"But you are *not* wanted," he retorted impatiently.

"Not by Mr. Thorold," I answered with temper, "but by stricken, suffering people,—and, besides, you confessed that you were terribly short-handed. Here is my chance, and I shall not let it slip."

"If you can help it," he retorted coolly.

"I ask you plainly—not as a woman to a man, but as

if I were a man" (here I saw the dawn of a smile upon his lips)—"have you a right to refuse my services? You are not to think of your own prejudices, but the wants of these miserable creatures."

"I must consider you, Miss Ferrars, as well as them." he said. "You are impetuous, impulsive, imperious," and he smiled; "you are a girl, accustomed to a sheltered home in England, and yet you ask me to suffer you to hurl your bright young life into the horrors of a plague camp, from whence you will emerge aged, heartsore, and saddened."

"I cannot age so much in a couple of months," I protested, "and I hope that my heart is with suffering—always."

"And your situation in Poonah? Do you suppose that a lady will care to employ a companion who comes to her direct from the pestilence?"

"It is very good of you to be interested in my affairs, but I am nothing to you—a mere stranger—why do you consider me?"

"Because it is my duty, and I cannot help myself," was his frank rejoinder.

"No, you cannot help yourself," I retorted triumphantly. "You must take me to the camp and find me employment. Where is the alternative?" I paused. "You have no right to refuse my offer; you cannot send me away, you cannot leave me here alone with the rats—and without food. You see, I *must* go to the camp."

"I see that you are beyond the reach of argument, and determined to have your own way," he exclaimed; "and on your own head be it! However, on one point I insist,—you must be inoculated."

"Certainly—in six places, if you wish," was my reckless reply.

"You will be entirely in the women's hospital, and have a small cupboard to yourself; you will have coarse food, long hours—the head apothecary will be your tyrant."

"It is well to be warned," I answered quickly. "I don't expect luxuries—I am prepared for anything."

"You may get the plague and die."

"And if I do, I shall die in a good cause," I proclaimed stoutly. "I am alone in the world—mine is a sort of spare life. I have no parents, no near relatives; I shall not be the means of putting any one into mourning; and I am of age, and answerable only to my conscience and myself."

"Same thing, I conclude? Well, I must confess, you are an independent young lady—and *I* shall care if you die!"

I stared at him haughtily. Was he daring to joke under such circumstances? At last I said—

"Please do not raise obstacles when I want to be of use. I am strong and willing; I have recently nursed my friend, Mrs. Evans—the ayah could speak for me."

"She cannot even speak for herself—it is a serious case. When you see the swelling behind the ears it is a bad sign."

"And what are your remedies?" I inquired.

"Plenty of fresh air, good food, warmth, nursing—that is all we can do; but the native specifics are midnight processions and hacking buffaloes to death. Ah, here is the dhoolie at last!" as, at this moment, we saw a twinkling light and heard muffled voices in the compound.

As he ceased speaking, a dhoolie was borne into the room and dumped upon the floor. Then one of the bearers and Mr. Thorold lifted the ayah carefully, and I arranged her covering and pillows, and assured her that I would not abandon her; but she was sunk in a stupor, and in another moment she was raised and carried away.

When the men's feet had once more shuffled down the steps, Mr. Thorold turned to me and said—

"The camp is two miles away—can you walk? or will you ride my horse?—he is dead-beat, and perfectly quiet."

"No; I can walk, thank you," I said stiffly.

"As for your baggage," looking round, "I'll send over for the small things. Your big boxes can stand where they are; they will be perfectly safe, for no one will come near the place, because the last khansamah died here of the plague. Come, I'll borrow this lantern;" and leading his horse by one hand, and carrying the light in the other, we started off in wake of the dhoolie.

It looked like a funeral procession in front of us. There was no moon, but the violet sky was pierced with stars. "Surely *my* star is not in the ascendant now," I said to myself, as I glanced from the firmament to the rugged path. Here was I in the company of the one man in the world I specially wished to avoid, and following him—for lack of roof, friends, or resource—right into the middle of a plague camp. We walked in almost unbroken silence, he leading his long-tailed grey Arab with one hand and swinging the light in the other.

"It's rather bad going in the dark, I'm afraid," he remarked; "and I'm also afraid that you will find it's a bit rough over there," nodding to where a dark line of

low huts came into view. "Mrs. Manuel, the woman doctor, will look after you, and you can have your meals together. She's an Eurasian—you won't mind?"

"Not the least, thank you."

"She is clever; but as she's small, dark, and insignificant, she has not much weight or authority. They all look up to an Englishwoman; *you* will have the authority, and she the experience. You must work it out between you as well as you can."

"I'll do my best. Is she the only doctor in this great camp?" I inquired, for, as we came nearer, it had acquired the dimensions of a town. Lights were twinkling, voices were humming, and everywhere there was a pungent odour of disinfectants.

"Oh, we have a capital Indian medical, but he dare not go into the women's hospital—sheds, I should say—and, indeed, he has his hands full. There is an apothecary who rules your side—Erasmus. Those are his quarters, where the dhoolie is set down. If I only had my way, and could have got hold of a pair of plough-bullocks and a common chukrum, you would never have set foot in this camp."

By this time we had arrived at an open door, from which came a blaze of light: and on the threshold, thrown out into distinct relief, stood a fat, grey-haired half-caste in a skull-cap and his shirt sleeves. He had evidently been disturbed from a meal, as, speaking with his mouth full, he called out boisterously—

"Is it the nurse from Bombay?"

"No, Erasmus—it is a lady volunteer," answered my guide. "Her ayah was taken ill at the dâk bungalow—there she goes," pointing to the dhoolie, "and Miss

Ferrars has offered her services to the women and children in this camp."

"Umph! umph!" he grunted, and it required all my fortitude to confront the scrutiny of his puzzled disapproving stare. "Experienced?"

"No," I answered, "but willing to learn."

"There are some people inquiring for you, sir," said Erasmus; "most urgent business."

"Oh, all right; then, I leave this lady in your charge. She is to be inoculated at once, and have something to eat; and ask Mrs. Manuel to look after her. Good-night, Miss Ferrars; I'll have your things brought over;" and Mr. Thorold lifted his cap and hurried away.

CHAPTER XV

ERASMUS, THE APOTHECARY

ERASMUS, the apothecary, compounded medicines in his little dispensary office, and with an absolute sway and an iron sceptre ruled over the women's department of the plague camp. He issued laws and edicts, browbeat his assistants, and punished all disobedience, cowardice, or carelessness with a heavy hand. He was a strong man, endowed with tremendous personal force—a very Napoleon of apothecaries. It was his daily custom to stand behind the purdah, feeling pulses and inspecting tongues, uttering threats and encouragement, advice or exhortation; and I firmly believe that many of the patients would have died but for their quaking fear of Erasmus. He would not suffer them to relax their nerveless hold on life—the mere terror of his voice roused them from their fatal lethargy. As for the staff of nurses and low-caste women, it was weak and overworked, and melted like wax in the presence of his anger. There was Mrs. Manuel, the lady doctor—his superior—whom he bullied savagely, and utterly despised; there were four trained native nurses and their helpers, but these were insufficient for the number of cases which poured in daily; so, when Mr. Thorold handed me over

to the apothecary, he seized on me with the avidity of a ravenous dog on a mutton chop. In the first place, he ushered me into his own sanctum, and gave me a share of his supper, which consisted of a highly seasoned pillau and excellent and fragrant coffee, for which I was truly thankful. When we had concluded our meal in solemn silence, he hurried me into the small surgery, and, having commanded me to bare my arm, inoculated me with a sharp instrument resembling a darning needle, which he plunged into my quivering flesh with thorough enjoyment. Next, he gave a loud order in an unknown tongue, and in a short time there appeared a flutter of petticoats, and a little woman in a grey gown stood at the door in an obsequious attitude.

"Mrs. Manuel, here is a lady probationer for you," explained Erasmus, with the gesture of a sovereign conferring a favour on some slave.

Mrs. Manuel was small, dark, and insignificant. Her plastered black hair was drawn tightly back from a high forehead and a clever, ugly face, out of which shone a pair of beady eyes like two boot-buttons. For a moment she surveyed me in calm astonishment; she was gravely criticizing my fashionable straw hat, my silk dust-cloak, my neat brown shoes—part and parcel of my trousseau.

"Oh, yes," resumed Erasmus, relieving her of the necessity of speech, "she does not look up to much, does she, as a nurse? Her ayah has the plague—bubonic case,—and Mr. Thorold brought her here himself from the dâk bungalow. You will put Miss Ferrars in Ward Four to-morrow, and take her away now and show her her quarters."

"Yes, Mr. Erasmus—certainly, Mr. Erasmus; but what

quarters?" asked the lady doctor in a meek and abject voice.

"Why, Miss Smith's room, of course; there is no other. And if she does not fancy it"—turning on me with a ferocious glare—"there is again the dâk bungalow. I shall expect you to report yourself to me to-morrow at eight o'clock sharp," he added, "and I will instruct you in your duties. She has had her supper, Mrs. Manuel;" and, with a wave of his hand, we were both dismissed into the soft black night.

"Did you ever see such a monster?" exclaimed my guide, as she escorted me between two rows of low huts.

"He is a good size, certainly," I admitted.

"He is as fat as a Bunnia; but I mean his manners."

"Oh!" I ejaculated with a laugh, "I did not know he had any."

"Nor has he, any more than a pig. By his talk you would suppose that *he* was the doctor, and I the apothecary."

"Yes, I certainly should."

"And I am an M.B., a graduate of Calcutta, and he is the son of a cook from Chittagong!" she said, quivering with antagonism. "He runs this camp—at least, the women's hospital. Every one is afraid of him—he roars and bellows like a mad buffalo."

"Surely he does more than that?" I protested anxiously.

"Oh, yes; he has ideas and experience as well as a tongue. He is clever, in a sort of coolie way—that I allow; but I'm terrified of him, and I never will fight for my position. So, you are a volunteer?"

"Yes," I replied; "and most inexperienced. I shall be thankful to learn whatever you will teach me."

"Well, well, we must see. We want help badly. These are your quarters," and she pushed open a door and we entered. "You won't mind?"

I saw a small, low room lined with grass matting. There was a dhurri on the floor, a neat camp cot, an armchair, a lamp, and a table. Some one had recently made up the bed with sheets and blankets; my luggage had arrived and been unstrapped.

"It is extremely comfortable," I remarked, as I looked round and took in all these details.

"Yes; I see Mr. Thorold has given orders. You are sure you won't mind?" she repeated expressively; "I mean, sleeping here alone?"

"No, indeed," I answered promptly; "but I should mind very much if I did *not* sleep alone—there is no room for another. Why on earth should I mind?" and I looked at her interrogatively.

"Because she—Miss Smith—died here, in that bed. But I suppose you are strong-minded?" she added dubiously.

"Yes." I was very tired, longing to lay my head anywhere. And I answered, "I don't mind at all. I suppose it has been disinfected?"

"Oh, my—yes! Well, I'll call for you at seven; I'm on duty to-night; sleep well," and she took her departure.

I lost no time in undressing and throwing myself down on the neat white cot. I was overwhelmed with sleep, yet a hateful inward voice kept assuring me that the "last creature who lay down here to rest was an English girl like yourself—she died of the plague on this very bed. Do you understand—the hideous, throttling, loathsome plague? Her stiff corpse was stretched out on

this very mattress, she breathed her last breath into this pillow, she lay here stark and rigid—till she was carried forth to be burned."

But in spite of all this inward clamour I slept soundly, as soundly as if I, too, were dead. In the morning when I awoke I had, as usual, some difficulty in realizing my new surroundings; but in a few seconds it came to me in a flash: I was in the Yellowgade plague camp. I rose and dressed, and was ready when Mrs. Manuel came to call me.

"You are an early bird," she exclaimed. "You might have stayed in bed another half-hour. I love my bed!"

"And I do not. I want to look round before I set to work," I replied. "This is just like a town of huts—what are they made of?"

"Of chuppers—frames of straw and wood, easily run up and easily burnt when no longer required; also cheap. Yes; we are all chupper on a brick foundation, and can knock up a chupper hut in no time."

"Like a house of cards—I see. And the tents over there?"

"Those are the quarters of Dr. Fraser and Mr. Thorold, and one or two officials. That other camp in the distance, by the river, is the segregation camp, where cases which seem suspicious are kept till they develop or till the symptoms disappear. Come and have your coffee now, and then you must go and see Erasmus."

By broad daylight, I discovered that that notable despot was as black as a coal and as autocratic as an Eastern potentate.

"Oh, ho, Miss Ferrars, so there you are—and punctual! Always be punctual," he urged, as he stared at me

exhaustively. "Mrs. Manuel will get you aprons, and now you must attend to me. My time is valuable. You have come to work, and not to play—eh?"

"Certainly not to play," I answered stiffly.

"All right, then. We have three hundred and twenty-four cases on this side, and only eight women—and half of them no good. Being an English Miss Sahib, they will look to you, not knowing," and his little eyes blinked wickedly, "that you are as ignorant as a dog."

This was rude—gratuitously rude; but Erasmus never minced his words, and overrode all by the powers of his will, his brain, and his crushing personality.

"Now," he continued, "when a case is brought, shall I tell you how you will know the plague?"

"If you please," I assented coldly.

"For an example, when a woman is shivering and looks frightened—as well she may—when her neck is swollen out so," indicating a space with his hands, "that is the bubonic form. When her head aches, her eyes are red, her pulse is quick, quick, quick—that is also the plague. When she raves and screams and struggles, it is the same—with fever. When she is drowsy, and cannot speak plainly, it is again the plague; and the most fatal sign of all is stupor."

"Yes; I understand."

"Now I will tell you more. Good nursing is important; good milk diet, as per rule; also four ounces of rum, constant poultices, and lots of fresh air. Pull down all their resais and purdahs and stuffy coverings. They will give you plenty of bother; but don't you mind. Say you have my orders, and just push along. For yourself, wear strong shoes—the very ground is poisonous; and

beware of a scratch on your skin when you touch a patient."

"Yes; I will be very careful," I said.

"You have Miss Smith's room; had she been careful, it would not now be vacant. You will come and report the cases in Ward Four to me twice a day, and in any emergency apply to me at once."

"Very well, I will do so."

"Mrs. Manuel will explain details; you and she will have your meals together. That is all;" and with a bow and a wave of his hand, on which shone a large diamond ring, my audience was concluded.

Mrs. Manuel and I took, or rather snatched, our food in a little room the size of a cupboard. As we swallowed down our simple curry bât, or goat stew, she found time to ask a few unprofessional questions, and to throw out a series of feelers respecting my past and future; but I was not disposed to be communicative. I could be discreet —sometimes, Mrs. Evans had declared.

I had made Mary Ann my especial care; I spared no efforts to give her ease and relief. Hers was a bad case; she was drowsy, but she recognized me—which, at least, was one favourable symptom. There were, unfortunately, many serious cases: rows and rows of women and children, stretched on charpoys, in all stages of the plague; and when I moved among the sickening and the dying, I must confess that sometimes my heart quailed at the task I had undertaken.

Mrs. Manuel came in occasionally, and gave me advice and assistance—for which I was most grateful; but it was a fact that the native patients turned to *me* instinctively, little knowing that I was a mere nobody!

To them I was the ruler of the ward, because my face was white and my hair blonde. To them I was the lady, the "Miss Sahib"—whilst the real and capable head of the hospital was a despised "Crannie." This head of the hospital gave me much encouragement as well as instruction.

"You will learn soon," she declared; "you are quick, and have a good nerve for an English girl: you are strong. All this week you have had only six hours' sleep at night, and the rest of your time you have been on your feet."

What she said was true, and I was astonished at my newly discovered powers of endurance. The plague spread; it raged worse than ever. We lived and breathed in an atmosphere of lime-washing and perchloride of mercury; yet I felt strengthened by a sort of inward fever, a desperate resolve to wrestle with this horror, this pestilence that walked in darkness, to struggle to the death with death. Each case in my ward that recovered, I hailed as a victory; whilst every stiff, stark form that was borne forth to be burned, represented a calamitous defeat. In spite of my reluctance, I was turned out for a short walk every evening in the neighbourhood of the camp. Around it stretched the vast plain, with its bare brown fields, where man and beast laboured incessantly—ploughing, harrowing, sowing; and then the cultivator, his work accomplished, waits, with the eternal patience of his race, for what the gods may send—rain and plenty, or drought and death. But neither man nor beast was now to be seen.

I turned my languid eyes to the river and the burning ghât, from which the smoke perpetually ascended to the

cold, hard, pitiless sky; and as I looked I used to cry within my heart, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

My zeal as a nurse proved to be infectious; the women in my ward worked with unflagging energy, and before many days had elapsed Number Four had obtained the proud distinction of being "lucky."

As for the outside world, I thought of it but little; my interests in life and death were enclosed within the chuppers of the women's ward. I saw Erasmus constantly, sometimes as often as a dozen times a day; I was scolded, scouted, shouted at, lectured, and—praised. I rarely came across Mr. Thorold, and then only for an instant. He looked thin and worn, and as if he, too, were fighting the plague as a personal opponent, and was determined not to succumb. Though he was rarely visible in our part of the camp, he made his presence felt; he ruled even Erasmus. He organized and planned improvements; the transport, the commissariat, discipline, all came under his eye; he spared himself no trouble, nor scorned to stoop to the most trivial detail. There was also the head doctor in charge of the camp, a kindly, sandy-haired Scotchman, who gave me many a word of encouragement and advice, and even said—

"I hear great things of your ward, Miss Ferrars. Don't go and overdo it. Remember, you are not a machine made of cast-iron; and I can't afford to have you amongst my patients. Don't let Erasmus impose on you, and don't let *all* the bad cases be dumped down in Number Four."

As time advanced the weather grew warmer, and the disease abated. The worst was over in those terrible ten days which had succeeded my arrival. Cases, instead of coming in a perpetual stream, came but slowly. Many

were cured, and returned home. The plague was abating, and we were able to relax our efforts and figuratively to draw breath. Mrs. Manuel and I saw more of one another now that we had some leisure, and we no longer devoured our meals in a few minutes. She was exquisitely neat and trim, and a really able little woman; certainly, rather shrill in her orders to her subordinates, and exceedingly fond of coffee and gossip—if gossip it could be called. Her curiosity was insatiable and unashamed. She craved to know all the sayings and doings in the Big Hospital, and emissaries curried favour by bringing her the news. She tried hard to pump me, and discover who I was, and where I was going; but I put her off with vague replies. She talked continuously, and was most communicative respecting her own concerns. It appeared that she was Miss, not Mrs. Manuel—thus much she confided; but "Mrs." seemed more suitable to J. Manuel, M.B., and "Misses" were of no account.

"I like you," she imparted to me one evening, as we sat at tea. "You work with a will; your heart is in it; and, besides that, you are not a bit stuck-up."

"No, indeed," I exclaimed. "Why should I be stuck-up?"

"I don't know. You hold your head so high, and look at one so straight, that it would never have surprised *me* if you had been. The first night I saw you I said to myself, 'There is a regular useless young duchess.'"

"And it was a bad shot," I retorted.

"It was. You deserve a lot of credit, that I will say. My! you did work, that bad week; and as for your ayah, it was you who pulled her through, and she knows it."

"Yes; and now she is very useful, as you see, besides waiting on us."

"It is more comfortable in every way since you came. After Miss Smith died, I declare I was nearly mad. She was never fit for this sort of mess; and, indeed, I had no idea of the slavery and 'dick' (the native expression for 'worry'), or that I should have to put up with that beast Erasmus. If I'd known, I don't think I'd have come; but of course the pay is liberal, and is a temptation."

"I suppose it is good?" I asked indifferently.

"Oh, yes; that's what brought me, I must confess—the money. You look surprised, but I am a poor woman; I have only my profession. I've relations to support, and, also, I am saving to marry. Oh, yes, *I'm* not going to be an old maid—don't you make any mistake about that. I'm engaged to a nice young fellow in a broker's office in Calcutta, ten years younger than I am, but so steady, and so fond of me;" and this ugly little middle-aged woman simpered inanely. "My profession cost me a lot of cash, and five years' hard work in Calcutta; and I cannot afford, like you, to work for love."

"For love!" I repeated. I was looking out beyond her at the great spreading plain, the pathless waste, the deep rose-coloured sunset. Well, I had done a little to help suffering humanity. "Yes, I suppose it comes to that," I murmured dreamily.

"Love—of Mr. Thorold," she added with a knowing smile; and her eyes were full of peculiar intelligence.

"What are you talking about?" I demanded, suddenly hurled down to earth and wrath.

"Well, well, I mean no harm. Come, now," she continued in a bantering tone that was exceedingly disagreeable,—"he brought you here; he gave most particular

orders about your room; he sent over his own lamp and clock—oh, yes, I know that; and, if all tales be true, many ladies are madly in love with him—so his bearer says. He is clever and handsome, and will be a great man. Your following him here was a bold scheme, and I know that he is——"

"Stop!" I cried, striking the table with my clenched hand, and feeling almost choked with passion. "Do you mean to say that, all this time, you believe I have worked here for the sake of Mr. Thorold?—that my coming to the camp was a ruse to be near him?"

"My dear, there have been whispers; you see, you are so pretty—so young; but of course I believe whatever *you* say."

"You believe me, I hope, before a scandal-loving ayah. I have never seen Mr. Thorold but once before I came here. I wish never to see him again. I came simply because I had no choice—no means of going on to Dassi; and I was thankful to have an opportunity of helping all these poor people. Oh, how shameful that such things should be said and thought of me!"

I rose from my seat. I felt that I could not swallow another morsel, and swept out of our little *salle-à-manger*, leaving Miss Manuel, with a piece of butter poised on her knife, staring after me in speechless dismay.

We made up our disagreement that same evening, when the lady doctor came late to my room, bringing a humble apology and an oblation in the shape of plantains. With these I graciously sealed her forgiveness—my anger being now appeased and my appetite ravenous; but from that self-same hour, Miss Manuel never again ventured to broach the subjects of love, money, or Mr. Thorold.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLOWER OF DEATH

EIGHT weeks had elapsed since that still, moonless night when I had stumbled into the camp at Yellagode, in the wake of Mr. Thorold; and during those eight weeks what scenes of parting tears and dry-eyed anguish I had witnessed, what sufferings, what deaths! The insight I had gained into native life was as astonishing as it was extensive, and I now felt a sincere respect and admiration for the patience and fortitude which most of my cases exhibited. Their resignation was due, perhaps, to fatalism, but their gratitude for any small service was touching and profound. It was a long time since I had encountered Mr. Thorold, for, if I had avoided him previous to Mrs. Manuel's announcement, I naturally hid from him now; and I never ventured to take my walks abroad, over the dull brown plain surrounding our camp, until I had watched him and his fiery grey Arab gallop out of sight.

And *he* had been the hero of love's young dream! Or was it not that other, now dead by his own hand, who had roused my sleeping emotions by the magic touch of his enchanted pen? Well, I had done with love's young dream for ever and for evermore, and love's young

dream had done with me. My future was grey and formless, and I must set my face to the cold, commonplace necessity of earning my bread.

As soon as I had been established as nurse, I had written to Mrs. Berners in Poonah, and explained how I came to be in such a situation. I expected that she would at once withdraw her offer, and I had mentally decided to place myself in quarantine for a week or two, and ask her to assist me to a post of some kind. I was consequently surprised to receive this friendly letter in prompt answer to mine:

"DEAR MISS FERRARS,

"I have read the tidings of your misfortunes and delay with much concern. It was certainly bad luck your going right into the plague district; but since you *are* there, and so bravely working in the hospital, I must confess that I admire and envy your pluck. It is just the sort of thing that one of Mrs. Evans's friends would do, and that she would have done herself. I hope you will come to me as soon as you are free. I have two small girls, and perhaps you would try your 'prentice hand on them? You will, of course, have all your belongings thoroughly disinfected, your camp apparel destroyed; and if you halt at Gooty Station dâk bungalow for a week *en route*, I really think you will be safe—but pray ask your doctor, as I dare not venture to run any risks. Please write again and let me know when I may expect you.

"Very truly yours,

"ANNIE BERNERS."

Now that the plague was daily decreasing, and the camp being gradually pulled down and burnt, I should soon be released. Mrs. Manuel and her satellites could easily manage without me, and I must prepare for my journey and announce my departure. I should be compelled to see Mr. Thorold and ask him to procure me transport and bullocks; and I was turning these matters over in my head one evening, as I was taking my usual constitutional aloof and alone. Strange to relate, and as if my thoughts had summoned him, here came Mr. Thorold approaching at a gallop. He had descried me from afar, and there was no escape; after all, it was absolutely necessary to speak to him; and I stood my ground.

"Good afternoon!" he cried. "I've been hoping to meet you for days; but you are almost a Purda Nashin lady, and so busy and so elusive that it is impossible to catch you"—dismounting as he talked.

Then he held out his hand and looked at me squarely. No; he was not ashamed to meet me face to face!

"I wished to speak to you," I began awkwardly.

"I am delighted to hear it; each time I have wished to speak to you, I have been told that the 'Miss Sahib' is engaged. Do you know that I have only set eyes on you half-a-dozen times since you arrived?"

"No," I answered coolly. "I have been—we have all been—working so hard."

"You, at any rate, have worked splendidly, Miss Ferrars; you have the real nursing gift. Doctor Fraser is eloquent in your praises; and as for Erasmus, you stand high in his favour—think of that!"

"Yes," I could not resist answering; "but merely because I remind him of his first wife."

"I say, what a compliment!" bursting into a laugh. "The work has told on you, as I predicted," he added with sudden gravity.

This was true. I felt it in my aching bones, and saw it in my thin cheeks and hollow eyes.

"I like it," I replied briefly.

"The worst is over," he continued. "In fact, I may say that we shall soon strike this camp. The plague comes suddenly, and goes in the same way. We can all take a holiday shortly; after next week you will be free."

"That is just what I wanted to speak about," I said. "I wish to go to Poonah and take up my post."

"Then, it has been left open?" he exclaimed with evident surprise.

"Yes. Mrs. Berners has been most kind."

"Mrs. Gordon Berners—husband a sapper?"

"I am not sure."

"She is a good little soul—I believe it is the same. And so you are going to Poonah?"

"Yes; on Monday, if possible."

"All right. I shall make the arrangements for your journey. The tonga, I am proud to say, has been recovered, but the unlucky driver is dead."

"Oh, poor man!" I ejaculated. "I am sorry."

"I wish I had some means of showing you how grateful I am—we all are, Miss Ferrars—for your help. I should like to bring your name before the Government; and I am——"

"Pray don't think of such a thing," I interrupted hastily. "I should *hate* it."

"Oh, just as you please," he acquiesced serenely. "Then,

since you refuse to receive honours, perhaps you will confer one?"

I made no reply, and he continued—

"It is this. Doctor Fraser has often wished to ask you and Mrs. Manuel to dine with us; but somehow I always choked him off."

"That was rather selfish," I retorted sarcastically. "Why did you nip his hospitable impulse?"

"Because," and he hesitated and looked down at his neat riding-boots, "I understand—I understand," and he now looked me full in the face, "that you would rather not meet me. I am aware that I remind you of an intolerable experience; I have an unlucky personal resemblance to my cousin Walter—who behaved like a scoundrel. I've had to thank him for some nasty legacies, but none so bad as this! I can readily believe that the very sight of me is hateful to you. Indeed, I saw it in your eyes that night when I held up the lamp. Only for Watty, you and I might have been friends. Of course, I recall——"

"Please do not recall anything," I interrupted, with my cheeks on fire. "Do me one favour: never allude to that awful time. What is it you wish me to do for you?"

"To dine with us on Sunday—you and Mrs. Manuel—a sort of little feast to celebrate the end of the camp."

"Thank you; but I do not think it can be managed," I replied. "In the first place, Mrs. Manuel and Doctor Fraser do not hit it off; and I have no gown; and another thing——"

"All right, Miss Ferrars," he broke in quickly; "one excuse is ample." For a second I thought he was offended;

but I was wrong, for a smile dawned on his handsome face, as he added, "As you have refused one small request, will you grant me another?—will you write to me from Poonah?"

"And you call that a small request!"

"Well, a humble petition. I wish to hear how you are getting on. Do grant me this favour! It is owing to my cousin that you are homeless in India, and I cannot have it on my conscience to lose sight of you."

"I beg you will not suffer my insignificant affairs to trouble your conscience," I retorted stiffly; "besides, conscience is much too grand a word for the occasion."

"Do you think so? Well, the conscience of a woman differs from that of a man. We never quite understand one another's point of view; this keeps us perpetually interested in one another."

"Pray speak for yourself," I answered; "there is not a man alive in whom I take the faintest interest."

"No, I suppose not," he assented quickly; "your disillusion has been too complete. But that attitude of yours need not—indeed, cannot—prevent a man taking an interest in *you*."

We were walking towards the camp, and, as he made this polite statement, he came to a sudden halt and surveyed me steadily; then continued, in a low voice—

"I wonder if you will ever forget that I am his cousin—and forgive me for his sins?"

"I wonder if you would do me a true kindness?" I returned, on the spur of the moment, for the recollection of that conversation on the verandah had suddenly flooded my brain.

"A thousand," he answered impetuously.

"It is only one," I said, walking on as I spoke, "and a very little one."

"What can it be?" he inquired. "Whatever it is, you may consider it already granted; and I am only sorry that it is, as you say, small."

"It is this, then," I said, now coming to a final halt outside the chupper hospital,—"that, after next Monday, you will cease to remember that I exist."

"What?" he exclaimed in a loud, startled voice.

"Yes; forget my face, forget my name. It is a small petition, easily accomplished, and, as you said, already granted."

"Not a small petition, nor easily accomplished," he answered, after a remarkable pause. "I see, Miss Ferrars, two things most distinctly," and there was an odd light in his penetrating eyes as they looked into mine, "you are relentless—and I am a scapegoat."

He was unquestionably offended this time! For my own part, I was speechless; this sudden onslaught took me completely aback. Mr. Thorold was not merely angry, he was brusque. I could be uncivil also; so I made no attempt to combat his opinion, but turned my back on him without further ceremony, and disappeared within the women's quarters.

* * * * * *

On Monday my packing was completed, my farewells were paid. I had exchanged promises to write with Miss Manuel, and, arrayed in a new gown (my camp wardrobe cremated), I was ready to start. There stood my old tonga and new bullocks, there were my boxes intact. I was immensely surprised to find that I was to receive

what is called "a send-off," and that a large crowd had assembled. There were all the nurses, Mrs. Manuel, and Doctor Fraser waiting to speed me and the ayah; she, however, had ascended to her place. Dr. Fraser spoke a few kind words, and wrung my fingers till I could have screamed; Mrs. Manuel kissed me repeatedly; Erasmus solemnly placed a wreath of noisome marigolds round my neck, and presented me with (glory of glories!) a gilded lime. The nurses endowed me with immense bouquets of rather travel-stained monthly roses, and the patients gave me a long chain of jasmin flowers. I was so loaded with honours that I had no hands to offer, and felt something between a bride and a coffin when at last I was seated in the tonga, overwhelmed with my bouquets, wreaths, and farewells. All had taken leave of me except Mr. Thorold, who had brought me to Yellagode humbly and on foot; now I was departing in a sort of triumphal floral car, and he had made neither offering nor adieux. I concluded that I had sinned past forgiveness, and my joy at my release was tempered with some twinges of remorse. Nothing in this world is absolutely perfect—no bliss is unalloyed; the shoe always gives a *little* pinch somewhere.

But in that particular case the little "pinch" was eased. When we had travelled about three miles I descried, to my surprise, Mr. Thorold awaiting us on horseback near a great peepul tree.

"Good morning," he said, riding forward. "I came to tell you that I've arranged all about the dâk." He paused, and added, "I wish you good luck; and I say farewell, not good-bye, as we are never to meet again."

"I'm afraid I was rather rude the other evening," I stammered, holding out my hand. "I am sorry."

"If you are sorry you might show it, instead of smiling"—taking my hand—"in fact, it is a broad grin. What proof or token do you offer of repentance?"

"This." And I suddenly twisted off a spray of jasmin and thrust it towards him.

Mr. Thorold lifted it to his lips with a half-playful, half-serious air, and then carefully arranged it in his coat.

"How you are decorated," he continued. "One would suppose that you were going to a battle of flowers."

"Yes; instead of to a railway station," I rejoined, "and no time to lose."

"Then it is good-bye—*only*," he said, raising his hat and reining back his horse.

"Good-bye—only good-bye!" I replied gaily; and, as our cattle lumbered forward in one direction, Mr. Thorold and his high-caste steed galloped away in another.

So, I was being trotted off from that scene!—I wondered what the next act in my life would be like.

Presently I raised the curtain and glanced back towards Yellagode, and discovered that Mr. Thorold's gallop had been a mere spurt; he had brought his horse to a standstill, and resembled a picturesque equestrian statue placed at the bend of the broad, bare road. He was looking after us. I felt myself blushing at the conviction that he was looking after *me*. Well, there was not much to see: what could possibly be uglier or more unromantic than the back view of a bullock-tonga as it waddled out of sight? But he—he made a gallant, a striking picture as he sat immovable on his high-caste grey.

When I turned round and let fall the flap, the ayah asked me in a querulous key—

"Why Miss Sahib giving Thorold Sahib the jasmin?"

"Merely to show that we parted good friends," I answered shortly. Was Mary Ann my self-constituted chaperon?

"Oh, yea—yo!" she groaned, "you English Missy never knowing, so you give. But native people know—it is the Flower of Death!"

CHAPTER XVII

A MAID-OF-ALL-WORK

Our journey to Dassi was achieved under the illustrious auspices of the Imperial Government; fresh bullocks and faithful chuprassis humbly awaited us at every stage: there was no clamouring for cattle or for food now. The road, which wound through a flat and fertile country, was bordered by acacias and other flowering trees; and perched on rustic platforms, amongst seas of yellow grain, sat women and children vigorously whirling their wooden clappers to scare the deer, wild pig, and flashing flocks of green parrots which boldly descended on the crops. At the railway station we had been so long in reaching we were received by an imposing Peon in scarlet and gold, who officiously cleared a way for us and our baggage, and added enormously to our importance.

As a precautionary measure, Mary Ann and I halted at Gooty Station, and there bivouacked for one whole week. We then resumed our journey to Poonah, where we were to separate. When I descended to the platform, Mary Ann hurled herself out of her intermediate compartment, and took leave of me with sobs and lamentations; in fact, our farewells were emotional on both sides, for the ayah was the last link between me and

my happy life among the woods and forests. She was still bathed in tears, and passionately kissing my hands, when a tall, dark lady suddenly accosted me.

"I wonder if you are Miss Ferrars?" she inquired brusquely.

"Yes," I answered, in unfeigned surprise.

"Oh, then, that's all right. I am Mrs. de Villars. Mrs. Berners has made you over to me; she left Poonah yesterday. That's India, you know—here to-day, gone to-morrow. Her husband was ordered to Burmah."

While Mrs. de Villars was talking in a quick, jerky manner, I was endeavouring to adjust myself to the situation and to my new employer. Mrs. Berners, whose photograph I had seen, was a little fair, fluffy-looking person; this lady was tall, thin, and loose-jointed, with a handsome, haggard face and flashing dark eyes of extraordinary vivacity. She wore an expensive white cloth gown embroidered in gold, much too magnificent for the occasion; a huge black-feathered hat toppled precariously on her dishevelled hair; a white lace tie, streaked with coffee-stains but fastened with a diamond star, and a pair of dirty white gloves completed her costume.

"So, you are taking leave of the ayah, are you?" she continued. "I'm always taking leave of mine. I hate them!" and she flung a glance of scorn at poor Mary Ann. "Here, you'd better open this chit, and see that it's all right, and come along;" and she handed me a note, which I read at once. It was written in pencil.

"Dear Miss Ferrars,

"I am so sorry, but my husband is ordered off to Burmah at three days' notice, and I'm taking the

children *home*. I do wish I had time to make arrangements for you, but I am utterly overwhelmed. Mrs. de Villars will give you this. She wants a companion, and if you——" Here a line was scratched out.

"With many regrets,

"Yours sincerely,

"A. BERNERS."

"Well, I hope it's all right?" asked Mrs. de Villars sharply.

"Oh, yes, thank you," I responded. "I suppose I ought to look after my luggage—the train will be going on."

"Do—my chuprassi will fetch it up; say adieu to the woman, and come along. I'll explain everything to you as we drive home. The carriage is waiting outside."

In a few moments I was following Mrs. de Villars as she trailed out of the dusty station, and we presently entered a fine landau, which was evidently her property. She was rich, young, careless—and what else? I wondered; and how could she find a use for me?

"I dare say your breath has been a bit taken away," she remarked, as we bowled along the Poonah roads behind her high-stepping bays. How different a sensation from the jogging of a bullock-tonga! "Put your feet up, if you like," she continued; "I generally do—I don't care how it looks. After all, it's my own carriage."

But I declined this invitation; and she resumed, "You see, I'm alone—I've no children—my husband is up on the frontier, and I remain here. It would be simply out of the question for *me* to live among a pack of wretches who always eat horses and who never wash! So I stay in

Plumah—it is so lively and central—and Tuby comes down when he can."

"It's a long way from Tuticut—is it not?" I ventured.

"Oh, yes; but he doesn't mind. He is always bothering me to have a companion—a nice girl. But I have never got hold of one yet. I've tried having a lady to stay and share expenses; but it never worked, and has led to my being cut by quite a lot of people. However, there is one great comfort in Indian society, it fluctuates—it is always moving—and so your enemies pass on."

"Did you know Mrs. Berners well?" I inquired. "Was she a great friend of yours?"

"Not at all—merely a slight acquaintance. She had not an idea beyond Dod and Mod, and I don't take the faintest interest in other people's children. I happened to be sitting next to her when she was talking about her new governess, Miss Ferrars, who had cut short her journey by marching straight into the plague district. She admired your pluck, and so did I; and she said you had a splendid 'chit'—I mean, a recommendation—setting forth your family, morals, and accomplishments in glowing terms. And when she was ordered off I heard she was at her wit's end about you, so I stepped into the breach. She was to have paid you forty rupees a month, and I agreed to give you sixty; so she wrote the note, and I came to meet you. Sixty rupees is nothing to me—I have more money than I can spend."

"What a delightful sensation," I exclaimed. "How few experience it! In all my life I've never had half enough."

"You? Oh, yes, I dare say," she acquiesced carelessly: "but I'm horribly wasteful and muddling. I was married

before. I was Mrs. Lobb—Lobb's pomade, you know—when Toby first met me; we stayed in the same hotel at Monte Carlo. He put-on for me at the rooms—and we sympathized over our losses. Yes, you'll have a nice easy time; and I like your face and your name. Your name first attracted me; wasn't there an Earl Ferrars who was hanged?—there! I'm always saying the wrong thing!"

"Not in this case," I replied reassuringly. "He was no relation, as far as I know. But what are my duties to be?"

"Oh, a mere nothing! Just to run the house, and hustle the servants, and keep them up to their work. And you will have to look after me, too; I'm frightfully unpunctual and forgetful. I hide my keys, before I go out, in the curtains, or under the rugs, or in the piano; and when I come back I never *can* remember where they are, and am obliged to call in the servants to help me to find them. It makes me feel so small. Then I leave my gloves, and handkerchiefs, and letters all over the place; I lose my money, my way, and my temper. I generally have my pocket hanging out, my veil falling off. Oh, you will have to pull me together;" and she gave a loud laugh. "Then I shall hand you over the keys, the house, and the servants—such a swarm of good-for-nothing coolies."

"I'm afraid I shall be a wretched housekeeper," I protested; "I have never managed a large establishment in all my life."

"That does not signify; you have merely to be always the same as you are now—cool, polite, and dignified. You have a collected manner. I'm sure you never get furiously excited, and give yourself away, and throw things, as I do."

Poonah—it is so lively and central—and Toby comes down when he can."

"It's a long way from Thibet—is it not?" I ventured.

"Oh, yes; but he doesn't mind. He is always bothering me to have a companion—a nice girl; but I have never got hold of one yet. I've tried having a lady to stay and share expenses; but it never worked, and has led to my being cut by quite a lot of people. However, there is one great comfort in Indian society, it fluctuates—it is always moving—and so your enemies pass on."

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"Not at all—merely a slight acquaintance. She had not an idea beyond Doll and Moll, and I don't take the faintest interest in other people's children. I happened to be sitting next to her when she was talking about her new governess, Miss Ferrars, who had cut short her journey by marching straight into the plague district. She admired your pluck, and so did I; and she said you had a splendid 'chit'—I mean, a recommendation—setting forth your family, morals, and accomplishments in glowing terms. And when she was ordered off I heard she was at her wit's end about you, so I stepped into the breach. She was to have paid you forty rupees a month, and I agreed to give you sixty; so she wrote the note, and I came to meet you. Sixty rupees is nothing to me—I have more money than I can spend."

"What a delightful sensation!" I exclaimed. "How few experience it! In all my life I've never had half enough."

"You? Oh, yes, I dare say," she acquiesced carelessly: "but I'm horribly wasteful and muddling. I was married

before. I was Mrs. Lobb—Lobb's pomade, you know—when Toby first met me; we stayed in the same hotel at Monte Carlo. He put-on for me at the rooms—and we sympathized over our losses. Yes, you'll have a nice easy time; and I like your face and your name. Your name first attracted me; wasn't there an Earl Ferrars who was hanged?—there! I'm always saying the wrong thing!"

"Not in this case," I replied reassuringly. "He was no relation, as far as I know. But what are my duties to be?"

"Oh, a mere nothing! Just to run the house, and hustle the servants, and keep them up to their work. And you will have to look after me, too; I'm frightfully unpunctual and forgetful. I hide my keys, before I go out, in the curtains, or under the rugs, or in the piano; and when I come back I never *can* remember where they are, and am obliged to call in the servants to help me to find them. It makes me feel so small. Then I leave my gloves, and handkerchiefs, and letters all over the place; I lose my money, my way, and my temper. I generally have my pocket hanging out, my veil falling off. Oh, you will have to pull me together;" and she gave a loud laugh. "Then I shall hand you over the keys, the house, and the servants—such a swarm of good-for-nothing coolies."

"I'm afraid I shall be a wretched housekeeper," I protested; "I have never managed a large establishment in all my life."

"That does not signify; you have merely to be always the same as you are now—cool, polite, and dignified. You have a collected manner. I'm sure you never get furiously excited, and give yourself away, and throw things, as I do."

"I think I can promise not to throw things," I answered with conviction.

"Toby says I've no system—and it's true. One day I'm up at five, and scuttle round with tremendous energy, and grand rows, and scoldings; then for weeks I am lethargic, rise late, and let things slide. You will see that the mallee arranges the flowers, the bearer dusts the rooms, the cook sends up the meals properly served; and order the stores and give them out, and bully the dhoby and the milkman—and never, never bother *me*."

"I will try," I assented. "I will do my best, at any rate."

"I give you all authority. You have also to see after the stables, and that the horses are brought up to the verandah to be fed, and get their grass weighed. Then there will be my letters to answer; and when I am at home alone, you will have to amuse me. By the way, I hope you play tennis?"

"Yes; but I'm only a very moderate player."

"I'm simply crazy about tennis, and play for hours—I've won many prizes; travelling and tennis are the two passions of my life. I shall want you to get up early and practise with me, as I'm playing in a big tournament next month, and I must keep up my form."

"Very well, I shall be delighted," I answered; "but I warn you that I am no good."

"Well, I think that's all," she said. "Oh, yes, except the birds and the dear dogs—you'll have an eye to them—Java sparrows, and Polly, and the white poodles, and Toby the spaniel—that's the lot."

My heart sank at the prospect before me. Nothing to do but superintend a large, disorderly household, look

after this erratic lady, act as companion, secretary, housekeeper, and lady's-maid, with the charge of the stables and dogs, and interludes of vigorous lawn-tennis practice!

All this time we were driving through Poonah; such a bright, stirring, bowery-looking place; past imposing public buildings, bazaars, shops, and bungalows almost smothered in purple bourgainvillia or showers of delicate yellow creepers; and in all directions the gold mohur tree flaunted its brilliant scarlet flowers. We met numbers of fashionable carriages—and I was much impressed by the smartness of the various turns-out: broughams, landaus, polo-carts, and victorias with Arab steppers. These latter, I noticed, were the favourite equipages of pretty Parsee ladies, whose gay and graceful costumes added another note of colour to the scene.

"I will see what I can do," I said at last; "but I am greatly afraid that I am not sufficiently experienced. I'm not accustomed to——"

"It will be all right," she interrupted; "*I'm* not the least afraid. How inquisitive some people will be when they see you!—their sole object in life is prying into their neighbour's affairs. One or two old women used to ask for Toby every time I met them, and simply worried me to death. At last I decided to call my spaniel Toby; and when they say, 'When *do* you expect Toby?' I reply, 'Oh, he is at home; but he does not care for any society but mine.' Of course, they are cats whom I do not visit, and they have never discovered that Toby is a dog. And here we are," she added, as we turned sharply into the entrance of a large and imposing compound.

Mrs. de Villars's bungalow was low, rambling, and crammed with costly furniture. The whole abode wore a

neglected, even squalid appearance. The drawing-room struck me as a room in which the owner had collected various things she had once thought pretty and then got tired of, and gave a general impression of draggled draperies, cobwebs, flowers, and dusty ornaments, faded cushions, and peacock's feathers. As we drove up, a crowd of servants and messengers were loafing around the verandah. Some were waiting with notes, some for orders; in the background a pock-marked Dirzee held aloft a half-finished bodice to attract his lady's attention.

* * * * * *

At first, when I realized the extent of my sphere, I felt that I really could not cope with the situation. The waste, the dust, the lazy, insolent retinue appalled me; but after two or three days I began to settle down. I rose early, and saw that the suite did their work—if they failed, I dismissed them. I kept the keys and locked up the stores, and sat in the verandah whilst the horses were brought up to have their gram. I took care that the mallee produced fresh flowers, that the rooms were dusted, the poodle washed, that Mrs. de Villars did not go out with odd gloves or in a torn skirt; and, with a little system, early rising, and regularity, I found that I could manage, and even spare time to play tennis, answer letters, superintend Mrs. de Villars's toilette, and snatch a few minutes for myself when my employer was absent on her ceaseless round of gymkhanas, tournaments, teas, and boating. Although she went out so much, Mrs. de Villars entertained but little at home; she detested the "bother," she frankly declared, and much preferred enjoying herself in other people's houses. On the whole, I liked my employer; and I was under the impression that she

had sketched herself to disadvantage. If careless, untidy, and hot-tempered, she was open-handed, warm-hearted, and never, never suffered the sun to go down upon her wrath, no matter how fiercely it had been aflame. But she had one or two trying peculiarities: she could never enjoy repose, and never make up her mind. With regard to the first, such was her incessant restlessness, that it was impossible for her to remain in the same place for half an hour. Her days were spent in rushing out and rushing home. She must always be going somewhere, flitting on, or dropping in; and even when she was at home, and I was reading aloud to her, she would jump up, and pace about, and sit in half-a-dozen different places. In church, it was maddening to be beside her; for with her gloves off and on, her scent-bottle, her fan and footstool, she was never still for ten seconds. Then, her other failing, the difficulty in making up her mind, was even worse. She would accept an invitation, and, before the messenger had left the compound, recall that, and decline; then, as soon as the other note was well on its way, loudly regret her decision. She would make large purchases in shops or the bazaars, and change her mind when the articles arrived; and it would be my truly humiliating and painful duty to return the articles with many apologies the following day. Before I appeared on the scene, she confessed that more than once she had issued dinner invitations and forgotten all about them, had gone off to Kirkee for a trip, or even down to Bombay, leaving her hungry and furious guests to drive away with indescribable emotions from her darkened abode.

"So, I'm not very popular with some, as you may imagine," she concluded, with her peacock scream. "Now

I have you to mind my manners, I am climbing back into favour; but they can't stand me at Government House, simply because I flatly refused to go in with a man I had cut. The A.D.C. tried his best to coax me, but I told him to call my carriage; and I came straight home, and dined on potted herrings and cold plantain fritters. I should find better fare now *you* are housekeeper."

Mrs. de Villars was recklessly extravagant, and ran up the most enormous bills—generally for what I considered rubbish; but she was allowed credit, and encouraged to increase her account, for it was well known that she had plenty of money, and would pay—some day. We got on together surprisingly well, in her opinion. She had never been so comfortable, she repeatedly assured me, and I was so sympathetic and quiet. At any rate, I was a good listener: when we were alone she talked incessantly, and invariably about herself. Before I had known her a week, and she had told me when and how she had met Mr. Lobb, and all the details of their engagement, her indecision, her marriage. I became fully acquainted with the names and affairs of her relations, and she spared me no details of her personal triumphs, her grievances, her clothes, her women-friends—and enemies. Strange to say, she exhibited but little curiosity respecting me, save to wonder why I was not married?

"Mrs. Berners told me all about you," she remarked in a casual way. "Good family, no money, no parents—of course you'll pick up some one out here. Did you not come out with that idea?" I felt myself becoming scarlet; and she resumed, "Never mind, I'll take you to Marbleishwar next season, and look after your interests,—though I'm not sure if we shall go there. That's the

worst of me, you see: I so soon tire of places and people," and she laughed. She had such a loud, unearthly laugh! "Life is so short," she would protest. "I want to get in so much, and see everything, and do everything, and that's why Toby finds me so frightfully wearing, and stops up in Thibet."

I was inclined to say, "Wise Toby!"

Mrs. de Villars lived in a whirl; she was wildly erratic —constantly changing her plans and her friends; she went out a great deal, but I rarely accompanied her, nor did I make many acquaintances. Still, I occasionally participated in gymkhanas, regattas, and tennis-parties, in the character of looker-on, and, on the whole, I enjoyed my bird's-eye view of the gay-society aspect of India. Whenever I did accompany my chaperon—or was I *her* chaperon? —she was generally the centre of a noisy group, laughing and gesticulating, or talking at the top of her high, shrill voice. She was a handsome creature with her tropical eyes and flashing teeth, though too restless and haggard to be universally admired.

The grand tennis tournament was in full swing. The grounds were crowded, and I was naturally among the interested spectators, sitting on a bench watching Mrs. de Villars playing in the Ladies' Doubles. The game was evidently going against her, and she was losing her temper — I regret to say that one was the invariable result of the other. I knew it by the quick twist of her skirt, her expressive face, and her impatient gestures.

"Miss Ferrars," said a voice, "I *am* surprised."

I looked up, and beheld standing beside me no less a person than Mrs. Blasson.

"Mrs. Blasson!" I ejaculated.

"Mrs. Lane now," she corrected complacently. "I am married; and you, I hear, are not?"

"No, I am still Miss Ferrars."

"It was, after all, not *my* Mr. Thorold you came out to marry. I thought it was so very unlikely; he is not a marrying man—and he is so fastidious. Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Isn't he interesting?" she questioned eagerly.

"No, I don't think so," replied my lying lips.

"Oh, then you cannot have seen *much* of him. And so you would not marry Watty Thorold?—I heard all about it. Courageous lady! But you always were courageous. I remember you, in the gale, when we all thought we were going to the bottom—I may as well sit as stand," and she subsided into a chair beside me. "I suppose you know that Watty Thorold has consoled himself, and is married?"

"No, indeed; but I am delighted to hear it."

"A different style from you. A conductor's daughter—a big, bouncing person with a little money. She actually wrote to Tizzie Hassall, and said she was an old love, and sent cards. Tizzie was frantic."

"Was this lately?" I inquired.

"About a fortnight ago."

"Are you staying in Poonah?"

"No; merely passing through to Secunderabad. And you?"

"Oh, I live here."

"I see!—did not care to return home. And whom do you live with?"

"I am companion to Mrs. de Villars, that lady with the orange belt, playing tennis."

"What!" she repeated, turning quickly round and surveying me. "Companion to Mrs. de Villars! How on earth did you arrive at that?"

"I had arranged to come to another lady, and, as she was obliged to go home at a few days' notice, she passed me on."

"Well, I think she ought to be ashamed of herself! —passed you on to Mad Fanny! Why, she's known all over India by that name. I suppose you are aware that only third-rate people tolerate her; no servant will stay with her, no husband—she has had *three*. Do tell me how long you have managed to hold out?"

"Two months. But we get on remarkably well," I answered with composure.

"Then, you are a really remarkable girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Lane. "Why, she never knows her own mind for two consecutive hours; she is always in pursuit of some wild idea. Last year she was a Buddhist, the year before a Baptist. She keeps her diamonds in a pocket-handkerchief, she has her parrot to sleep with her, she eats pounds of native sweets—any one who does *that* must be mad."

"'Je n'en vois pas la nécessité,'" I quoted.

"Oh, you will see several necessities before you have done with Fanny! You have been with her two months? Well, well, well!—just look at her this moment, raving and stamping her foot. If you don't leave her, she will leave you—and the sooner the better," rising as she spoke. "I called you courageous for throwing over Watty Thorold, but your alternative is a thousand times more

dangerous. You are foolhardy, Miss Ferrars. I'd much rather have married an impecunious planter, if I'd been you, than be the companion of Mad Fanny. Here she comes, literally foaming at the mouth; I dare not face her. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVIII

"CHANGE FOR JAPAN AND MADRAS"

In a right royal rage, and with blazing eyes, Mrs. de Villars came hurrying forward, and in a surprisingly short time I was swept before her out of the tennis ground and into the carriage. There, as soon as we were seated *vis-à-vis*, the storm burst. She explained, with full details and breathless eagerness, the circumstances of the lost game. As she spoke, I *did* notice some little flecks of froth at the corner of her lips.

"I lost the doubles entirely through that beastly Mrs. Byng and her missing half the balls. When I screamed at her, she only laughed—but she is not laughing now," added her partner triumphantly. "When I called out, 'Do run about, you fat old woman!' she was mad. I will never speak to her again, and she will never speak to me again—so that's all right," concluded Mrs. de Villars, somewhat hysterically.

However, the typhoon of temper, as usual, passed over almost as swiftly as it had arisen, and by the time we had reached home it had subsided into faint mutterings, and my companion was turning her attention in the direction of the great tennis ball—at which she was to appear that night. The choice of her dress was made

and altered at least four times; but at last she was finally arrayed in a flame-coloured garment, and, with diamonds shining in her dark hair and on her neck, she really presented a most brilliant figure. It was perfectly true that she kept her tiara, necklace, sun and stars in a large silk handkerchief in her wardrobe—for the extraordinary reason that "she was afraid of thieves."

"No, they would never dream of looking among my petticoats and stockings," was her invariable answer to all expostulations.

To which I would reply, "I'm not so sure of that, if they received a hint."

Naturally, I always discountenanced this amazing arrangement; but I spoke to deaf ears, and was warmly assured by my employer that she had "a method in her madness." If she had, it was the madness only that was apparent to any one but herself. To-night, Mrs. de Villars drove away—a blaze of jewels, and for once the handkerchief was empty. When she had departed, I sat in the verandah with the sham Toby, and listened to the distant strains of a regimental band which floated from afar on the still air.

Thanks to Mrs. Lane, I had unusual food for thought. I was sincerely glad that Watty was married—and to an old love, after all. This marriage lifted a load off my mind, for I had sometimes shuddered as I recalled his picture of the awful loneliness, the rain, and the temptation. But I felt convinced that a woman who could write to Tizzie, and send cards, was sufficiently strong to support Watty. And unquestionably Mrs. Lane was wrong; I was far better off where I was than I should have been as the wife of Watty Thorold. Some things she said had enlightened

me. So Mr. de Villars's absence was not solely on account of duty, and Mrs. de Villars had been married twice before! No; she was not in the best set, but among a circle who tolerated her for her carriage, her occasional dinners, her reckless good nature, and her lavish presents. These people, I recalled, had sometimes favoured *me* with glances of interrogation bordering on speech.

The parrot story was a foolish fable: Polly was merely brought in with early tea. Undoubtedly the consumption of native sweets was one of Mrs. de Villars's weaknesses; but, after all, what were her weaknesses to me? I received sixty rupees a month; I was earning my living, I was seeing India; and as soon as I had saved sufficient money I would return to England, for I began to realize that a girl without friends, relations, or ties was an anomaly in the Far East. In a year's time I should have saved my passage-money, and, with a small sum in hand, would start as a professional pianist in London, or a music teacher. Such was my castle-building—doomed, alas! like similar architecture, to be shattered to atoms—and that within a few hours.

As Mrs. de Villars and I sat at a late breakfast the following morning, the English mail was brought to her, and she immediately began tearing open her letters. As she laid one of them aside, she turned to me quickly, and said—

"What do you think? I'm off to Japan the day after to-morrow! Oh, yes; you may well stare, but I adore change. Toby's cousins are *en route*, and I'll just run down and catch them at Colombo. Won't they be surprised! I always meant to see Japan, and here," gesticulating with both hands, "is my chance! I'll be back

in three months—or six, as I may run round by America and home."

I was too stupefied to articulate, and she resumed—

"I'll shut up the house, and leave Ahmed in charge. You will help me to put everything away; I'll send the silver to the bank. Mrs. Black will take the dogs and birds. I must wire to Toby—perhaps he would take his leave in Yokohama. You'd better write to those people who were coming to tiffin, and say I'm off—— Oh, yes——"—a long pause—"What about *you*?"

And she leant both her frayed elbows on the table and stared at me. I can see her now, with her great dark eyes, her tousled hair—it was naturally curly—and her shabby pink tea-gown with its ragged lace front.

"Yes; what about me?" I repeated, with a laugh. "You have arranged for the dogs, and the silver, and the birds—but what *is* to become of me?"

"I suppose you could not take a temporary place—say for three months?—or come with me, and pay your own expenses?"

"Oh, no; I could not afford it," I hastened to reply; "and when I leave India, it will be for England."

"Well, then, look here," she said. "I owe you two months, that is one hundred and twenty rupees, and I will give you forty more, instead of notice, and a splendid chit, so that will be all right;" and she stood up. "No—on second thoughts, I'll make it a hundred, for you really have been a trump."

I made a rapid calculation. With one hundred rupees (about seven pounds), and twenty pounds remaining of my nest-egg, I would go to Madras, look for a situation,

save for the next year, and return home. Oh, I had had enough of drifting about India.

"Very well," I said. "Thank you. I shall be ready whenever you please."

"Then fly away this moment"—with a wild gesture—"and give the servants notice, and pack the drawing-room things: the ornaments and photographs, the silk cushions; get the rugs rolled up—or, stay; write the notes first, and I'll order the brougham and leave them. No—well, perhaps you'd better get the silver packed first now, ready to go to the Bank."

I hurried off at once, with this errand in my mind, summoned two servants, got out the plate-chest, and began to collect, sort, count, and put away in silver paper and baize, when, in the midst of this serious business, Mrs. de Villars appeared, in her hat, and said—

"I'm just going over to tell Mrs. Black, and ask her to take the birds and the dogs, and, on second thoughts, I'll let those people come to tiffin, and we shall want the silver."

This was the worst of Mrs. de Villars—she changed her mind continually, and gave contrary directions, and upset all her own plans ten times a day. She was unusually erratic and excited during the ensuing rush. I rarely got to bed before two o'clock in the morning: writing notes, making lists, giving chits, paying bills, and running messages.

"I've never left the house in such an orderly state," boasted Mrs. de Villars, rubbing her thin hands—"in fact, never left it in any order at all,—and it is all thanks to you. You *are* a willing horse; you are a treasure. Now tell me, what are your plans?"

"I think of going to Madras, and getting a temporary situation among some of the rich merchants; and later on I shall return to England, and start as a music teacher."

"Bah!—what a prospect! No, no; *that* won't come off—you will marry. One reason I did not take you out much was that I was afraid of losing you. If you had got an admirer, and been engaged, I and my affairs would have been left in the lurch. As it is, I'm afraid it's rather the other way: I'm leaving you in the lurch. But it cannot be helped; and a pretty girl is bound to fall on her feet. You've been immensely admired—if that's any comfort—and if I had not been going to Japan, I certainly should have taken you to Marbleishwar this season, and got you a good husband."

"Thank you," I replied, with an irrepressible burst of laughter; "but I'm not——"

"Come, come, come!" she interrupted; "not going to be an old maid, I'm sure. Now, I dare say you have some packing to finish; and remember that we start at six o'clock."

I had caught a glimpse of the North-west, the Central Provinces, and the Deccan, and now I was about to visit the oldest presidency: the real palmy, idol-worshipping tropics, where, instead of brown blankets and chupatties, the costume was muslin and the food was rice. I travelled by a later train than Mrs. de Villars, and we parted, as we had met, on the Poonah platform. She had but little luggage, and I saw her off first-class, of course, and accompanied by Fernandez, a Portuguese servant. For my own part, I took a second-class ticket, and was sped by Ahmed, a bearer in whom Mrs. de Villars reposed great

faith, but whom I never could endure. However, he looked after my baggage, put all my small parcels into an empty carriage with his own hands, and, in short, made himself extremely useful. After all, despite his sleek fat face and sly eyes, I did not wonder that Mrs. de Villars praised him; he was so quick and clever, as well as noiseless and inscrutable. I was the only passenger in my compartment, and I seated myself in the window, from whence I responded to Ahmed's profound salaams, and there I remained motionless for several hours. I saw India as a panorama gliding past me: first Kirkee and other familiar scenes, then old hill-forts, fortified towns, jagged ranges of red hills, green paddy-fields, wide rivers. At last I turned to arrange my belongings and to get a cloak, for the evening was chilly. I moved aside my bag, and, as I did so, I discovered that there was something peculiar about it. Yes; the inner pocket and flap containing my money and letters had been neatly cut out with a pair of scissors. Ahmed had made this bag his special charge, and I now recalled his smile as he received my "buchseesh" of five rupees, and the ironical depth of his farewell salaam. I had nothing in the world but sixty-five rupees, the change from my railway ticket—which I had luckily put in my pocket,—no reference, no splendid "chit." What was to become of me? Sixty-five rupees (less than five pounds) would not go far in a Madras hotel; and when that was spent—what then? I felt so utterly disheartened, as if Fate had a determined spite against me, that I broke down and wept. I believe I wept hopelessly and helplessly, and for quite a long time; I wept until I suddenly realized that we were entering a large station. I therefore endeavoured to smother my sobs, and dried

my eyes with nervous haste; but they did not escape the notice of a young guard who was passing. He paused, stared into the window, and said—

"Hullo! what's the matter? Aren't you going to get out and dine?" Perhaps if I had been a first-class passenger he would not have addressed me so familiarly —poverty occasionally helps one to strange friends.

"No, indeed I am not."

"What! are you sick?" he inquired sharply.

"Not exactly; but I've just discovered that I've been robbed of all my money—some one has done this;" and I showed him my bag.

"A neat trick." And he opened the carriage door and sat down and examined it closely.

"How much?"—raising his head and his round blue eyes.

I told him with a fresh burst of tears.

"I hate to see a girl cry. And you *are* up a tree, and no mistake, if you have no friends, and no chits, and no money!"

"I have sixty-five rupees in notes."

"Come, then, that will keep you afloat."

"Not at an hotel in Madras," I protested.

"No; but, look here, I'll give you a tip. There are lots of cheap boarding-houses out Vepery way and Blacktown: they take you in from eight annas to a rupee. I know a rupee one—Rosario's, 16 Crundall's Road, Vepery. Mistress Rosario is a decent old body, as black as your hat. She will look after you if you say Giles—that's me —sent you."

"Thank you very much."

"It's rather a rough-and-tumble sort of place; but you

won't mind—it's cheap and respectable—and you can look out from there, or write home."

"Yes; I suppose I can," I admitted, with a sob.

"You have hair the colour of my sister's—and that's what struck me first. Lord! how you have been crying! What's the good of it? Come along now, and dine with me."

"No, thank you; I don't want any dinner," I responded wofully.

"And I do—and so do you; crying must take it out of you. I'm a gentleman, you will be surprised to hear—failed for everything I could fail for, and so I came out here to be self-supporting. I shall get a rise some day; and, meanwhile, it's better than loafing at home and living on my governor. It's pretty hard work, but I don't mind that. Well, since you won't honour me, I must go."

And he jumped out and banged the door; but, before long, a waiter in a red turban brought me some cold chicken, bread, and a bottle of iced lemonade—sent by Giles Sahib, and paid for. I gratefully accepted his kindness, ate the little meal, and subsequently felt much revived; and for this refreshment, and the address of the rupee boarding-house, I had to thank the colour of my hair!

At that most comfortable of all Indian junctions, Arkonum, my good friend again appeared to take leave of me, and said, somewhat breathlessly—

"I've made you over to Jenkins; he'll see after your luggage, and get you a gharry. I'm going on to Mettapollium—so good-bye;" and he held out his hand and shook mine warmly. "Good-bye; keep up your spirits—good luck."

CHAPTER XIX

16 CRUNDALL'S ROAD, VEPERY

My heart beat a little faster as I began to realize that the green rice-fields and date-palms were gradually giving place to a region of low-lying plains and sandy soil. The moist, warm air that blew through the carriage window brought a salt taste from the sea, and soon we were among scattered suburbs—the harbingers of a large town. I was approaching Madras, and the end of my period of peace and inactivity, with but five pounds between me and starvation. I must be up and doing: I had made a very simple calculation; with strictest self-denial sixty rupees would maintain me for two months. Surely, in two months I was certain to find a situation, and my present task was to be both economical and prudent.

In a very few minutes I found myself in the middle of the tumult and clamour of a great Indian terminus, and was jostled hither and thither by hordes of passengers with their bundles, baskets, and cooking chatties, children, and even favourite fowl. I noticed one old woman with a pet hen under her arm! It was like the exodus of a tribe, or ten tribes. The native of India has a passion for travelling, and is able to enjoy it at a small cost.

After a short delay "Jenkins" came up to me; he

was older than the other guard—a pleasant-looking little man with grey hairs in his beard.

"I've engaged you a gharry, miss," he announced. "You get in and drive straight to Mistress Rosario's, 16 Crundall's Road, Vepery. She is a motherly old soul—not much to look at, though there's a good lot of her. She will give you bed and board till you can turn round. She has a house full of relations—and mind you don't lend them any money."

"Lend money?" I echoed blankly.

"Yes; hold on to what you've got, and tell her that Giles and Jenkins sent you. I wish you luck—the G.I.P. will always find me if wanted—good-bye;" and he handed me into a sort of green-shuttered box on wheels, drawn by a raw-boned white horse, and driven by a boy all turban and tatters.

My luggage had been tied on with what looked like a red rag, and we departed at a headlong canter amid a cloud of dust. First of all we passed a people's park, then a hospital, bazaars full of life and bartering, and in a short time we were speeding along a wide road lined with shabby bungalows standing well aloof in large, bare compounds. At the broken-down entrance of one of these we made a sudden sweep, careered up a rutty approach round a circular patch of garden, and drew rein under the porch of a long, low residence, with a deep verandah of many pillars and a faded yellow complexion. This was furnished by a number of broken-down straw or cane chairs, each exhibiting a round mark suggestive of heads and hair-oil. There were also some neglected ferns and unhappy crotons bursting from their pots, a hen and her chickens, a sleeping pariah; and over all these hung cobwebs and

a torpid silence. Presently a Eurasian child in a very dirty pink frock came and peeped out through the broken chick, and then ran away. The driver shouted and shouted; at last he descended in a fury, and hurried round to the back premises; whence he returned in a few minutes, followed by a servant who was putting on his coat as he ran, and who brought with him a strong suggestion of cooking and tobacco. He invited me to enter, in good English, and pushing aside the lop-sided chick, I was ushered into a large, dark reception-room. Here I waited for a considerable time, and when my eye had recovered from the outside glare, and become accustomed to the dim light, I became aware that the apartment had once been fine, and was still pretentious. I subsequently heard that these spacious old bungalows were, in former days, the quarters of officers commanding native regiments. The compound was covered with dusty grass, holes, and bits of crockery; the patch of garden, once the colonel's pride, was a mere tangle of oleanders and country roses, and the resort of fowls. This fine drawing-room, where his wife had entertained, was now dilapidated, frouzy, and mean. The walls were of a deep rose shade, the colour of carbolic tooth powder, and covered with great streaks of damp, flaring oleographs and paper fans. The curtains, once white, were red with dust. A cottage piano stood out, draped with what looked like a muslin dress. There were plenty of cane chairs in all stages of age and deformity, a round table covered with photographs and shells, but not one flower, book, or plant. I noticed, however, a brave display of dust, and the smell of cocoa-nut oil penetrated the entire establishment. I sat so long waiting, that the patience of the white horse became

exhausted. He stamped and stamped and stamped, until he got upon my nerves, and in desperation I darted out, paid his "garriwan," and suffered them to depart. The clock in the drawing-room, which was much too slow, ticked away languidly, and still no one came. I caught a glimpse in an adjoining room of a long table, a dingy cloth, and some knives and forks and blue glass salt-cellars —unquestionably the *table d'hôte*. At last I heard a shrill voice calling from the back regions—

"I am not dressed! I will not go; I cannot go! Run, Mardie girl!"

After an impassioned but smothered argument, the chick over a door was violently agitated, and finally it gave admission to an enormously stout elderly woman wearing a sort of loose cotton dressing-gown and wool worked slippers. She had three chins, no neck to speak of, and a pair of kindly dark eyes. Her hair was gathered up in a small knob, and in one hand she carried a large can, and in the other a straw fan. She stared at me for a moment in stupefied silence ere she announced—

"I've been seeing the cows milked, so please excuse. If I go away, they will water the milk. Oh, my, they do cheat!" Then she put down the can, and added, "I hear you want to board, miss. There must be some mistake."

"You are Mrs. Rosario?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes," seating herself in the largest cane chair.

"I wish to board and lodge with you for a time—if you can accommodate me. Mr. Giles, the guard, gave me your address."

"You, an English young lady, want to board here?" she cried, and her voice was bordering on a scream.

"Yes; I am told your terms are moderate—one rupee

a day—and as I have just had all my money stolen, and am without friends, I should like to remain here till I find a situation."

"You have references, then?" she demanded in a sharp business-like key.

"No; my references, letters, and most of my money were in this bag;" and as I spoke I exhibited its mutilated condition.

"Oh my gracious! Your cash stolen—no friends—and Giles sent you!" and she gazed at me thoughtfully. "Well, miss, you shall stay; but I'm awfully crowded at present; and we are not tip-top folk!"

"Can you give me a room?"

"Whatt!" she cried, "a whole room? No, indeed, I cannot. You can have half of Lola's bed. Oh my! how hot it is!"—fanning furiously. "We must see whatt we can do, and get your boxes in. Lily helps me, but she is gone to the bazaar. We cannot get the people to send the things we order. Oh my! they do plague. The butcher promised the beef, but because I did not pay his last month's bill, he will not give the meat. Oh my! they are cheeky wretches. Sawmy! Sawmy!" and the grimy servant appeared. "Take those boxes out of the verandah, and get them into the end room. We," turning to me, "are overcrowded now, but next week we shall be better. Mardie (Maudie) girl, come in"—the Eurasian always bawls from her chair—"Mardie, come and talk to this nice lady."

Mardie came forward from where she had been lurking in the dining-room, tucking her chin into the dirty lace of her frock, and offered me a limp hand and a keen, sly stare.

"Oh my! Mardie, whatt a dirty frock!" said Mrs. Rosario.

"Well, grand-aunt, the dhoby says he won't bring my frocks till he is paid."

"There is your new one—where is thatt?"

But unhappily it was the same story; the tailor would not send the new frock until his bill was paid. Grand-aunt merely laughed, and shook her sleek head; debt sat but lightly on those fat shoulders. "Well," struggling up, "we must push along somehow. Lily has gone to the bazaar, so I must go myself and see about your room. Come, miss—whatt is your name?"

"Ferrars—Pamela Ferrars."

"Then come, Miss Pamella Ferrars, and we will see where you can be comfortable."

As she spoke she waddled out into a long back verandah, a perfect cemetery of old furniture, crockery, lamps, tins, bottles. Surely there was the wreck of a sofa, which might have belonged to Clive! Poor old sofa, with your straight back, quaint carvings, and one leg! what interviews you may have assisted at—diplomatic, tender, tragic; or were you French? Had Lally rested on you? Did you come from Pondicherry? Only one thing was certain—you were venerable, and once on a time you were valuable, and before long you would be helping to boil gram or bath water! From the verandah we proceeded into a large room, the walls of which were coloured pea-green, and stuck about with texts and fashion-plates. It contained two untidy cots, a little furniture, and a vast accumulation of clothes: garments were flung about in all directions, some depending from strings across corners, others from the simple nail. There was one

almirah (wardrobe) so choked that the doors would not close. A dressing-table displayed a large but tarnished mirror which, like the old sofa, had evidently seen better days, and around it were heaped brushes, powder-puffs, and a mixed assortment of gloves, collars, and odds and ends of tawdry finery.

"Well," said Mrs. Rosario, looking about complacently, "this is where Eulalie and Gwendoline are——oh, yes, and Lola. I shall put Lola with Rosamond, and you can have her place in Gwendoline's bed."

"But may I not have a mattress on the floor?" I pleaded. "I've not been accustomed to——"

"Oh, my—yes," she interrupted. "Wait; I think my gossip, Mistress Cardozo, might lend me a cot. Oh, here is Lily coming," looking out on a gharry that passed under the porch; "we shall push along now."

I saw, over her head, a girl in a gay blouse sitting erect in the vehicle; on the opposite seat was a basket of vegetables, a bundle of clothes, and a slab of beef. Evidently her foraging had been successful. Lily, a plain girl wearing spectacles, met us in the doorway, and was formally presented by her aunt.

"Miss Ferrars, this is my housekeeper—my niece, Lily Lyster-Montfort. Lily, you will look after Miss Ferrars, and make her comfortable. Now, I wonder if Mistress Cardozo would lend me a cot?—you try. I must go and see if the cows have been fed. Excuse"—and she trotted off.

"Auntie thinks of nothing but cows," grumbled the girl, as she dragged at her gloves. "She ought to have been a Brahmin woman." She looked hot and worried, and had evidently been in conflict with the butcher and the

washerman. "Are you really coming to stop here in this boarding-house?" she asked, with a stare of incredulity.

"Yes, for the present," I replied.

"Well," and she gave a short laugh, "I am sorry for you; but I'll do what I can to make you comfortable." Then she took off her hat, looked about, and sighed profoundly.

"You are not in this room, are you?" I inquired.

"No, indeed, thank goodness! I could never stand Eulalie's vanity and Gwendoline's tongue. I am with Rosamond and Joe and Maudie."

"You appear to be rather full."

"Oh, yes; that's nothing"—scribbling on an envelope. She called out, "Here, Maudie! do you run over to Mrs. Cardozo's and give her that, and don't loiter with Lucilla." Turning to me she explained, "It's for your bed. Now, there is an old dressing-room off here, the roof is not safe, and it's full of white ants; but it might do to keep your things, and you'd be out of the crowd"—opening a door as she spoke.

I looked into this tumble-down bower with some dismay—it was long, narrow, and bare, and the red-tiled roof and rafters were caked with the ravages of white ants! It contained one chair and a piece of old date matting; but I hailed it with joy. Here, at least, I should be alone—it was a sanctuary!

"We will move your boxes in as soon as the place is swept out, and we must get bricks to raise them off the floor, otherwise the white ants will eat the bottom out of them in a few hours. I think I can find you an old tea-poy and a washstand. You might buy a glass for a

rupee—you will *never* get a chance at the one in the next room. You will have to sleep there, of course."

"Very well," I answered; "but why not here?"

"Because the roof is dangerous. The rafters, you see, are eaten away, and might crash in at any moment—it's all the white ants. Why did you come here?" she asked suddenly.

"Simply because I could not help it," was my candid reply. "I could not afford to go to an hotel." And I briefly related my misfortunes.

As I explained the situation, Lily sat down on the edge of a bed and listened to me gravely, and I could see that she was mentally comparing her clothes with mine. When I had concluded, she said—

"You want a situation? Yes, I hope you may find one—meanwhile, here you are among *us!* We are a regular warren of people. First of all Auntie, who is taken up with her cows and her chickens; then there is John, who is my father, always hoping to make his fortune, and never earning a pice; Frederick Augustus, who is well off, grand, grumbling, and odious; Claude and Alonzo van Lede, who are both in Barry's house; Fitz Alan, who idles, and dances, and dresses; old Auntie Gam, who has hardly a tooth in her head; and then there is Eulalie, a shop assistant, Gwendoline at the school, and Lola, who is studying medicine—and so am I, and, as soon as I pass, I am off."

"Oh, are you?" I murmured. It mattered but little, as I should certainly be "off" before her.

"We are out all day," she resumed, "at the Doveton College or Medical College. The young men are in houses or shops; so it's only early and late you will be bothered."

"What do you do of an evening?" I asked.

"We go to the band, or the park, or the theatre, or we have company at home and dance. We clear the drawing-room and some one plays. We breakfast at eight for the young gentlemen—just coffee and country bacon and third-class fish."

"Third-class fish!" I repeated. "What is that?"

"Cheap fish—what the natives eat. You cannot expect much for one rupee a day, can you?—though some houses take eight annas. We dine at seven—stewed beef and curry, and country vegetables. You pay for your own washing and soap. We settle up once a week. I keep the books. Some are regular, some run on for months. There are those girls, Eulalie and Gwendoline—they have not paid for ages; they owe the shops, and the hawkers, and the dhoby, but as long as they are fine they do not care. Well, now, I've told you a good deal," she proclaimed, rising to her feet. "I see the cot coming over, and I must go and look after your things. You can settle into your den at once."

I had not been long settling into my den when I heard loud talking in a high incredulous key, and shrieks of unrestrained laughter—the other boarders had evidently returned. By-and-by I walked boldly into the bedroom, my only means of exit, and discovered three girls. One was doing her hair, one was powdering her nose, and a third came skimming towards me with outstretched hands. She was so supremely and unexpectedly lovely that I experienced a sort of agreeable shock. She wore a pink blouse, a white shirt and shoes, and a row of pearls round her neck, and might easily have been taken for an Andalusian beauty, with all the best blood

of old Spain in her veins, instead of a pretty shop-girl from Blacktown, Madras. Her figure was grace itself, her feet and hands were perfect, her head was admirably set on, her features were regular, her mouth was merry, and her eyes were glorious. This radiant creature welcomed me with an effusive kiss, saying, in the purest "chi chi" accent—

"I am Eulalie! I expect that Lily has given you a fine character of me. Never you mind, I am not so black as I am painted." She was not black, or even brown. "So you are going to stay here!—and we must all be good friends. That is Gwendoline," as another pretty girl with light brown hair and blue eyes came forward, and stared and simpered. "And this is Lola." Lola was a sharp-looking young person with high cheek-bones and a dark complexion. "She is our clever one," explained Eulalie, with a giggle: "she takes great prizes already, and is going to be a lady doctor, and so rich and famous."

"Who ever heard of a rich lady doctor?" protested Lola, with a jerk of her head. "There is the bell," she continued. "Oh, I am so hungry!—and if it is dâl curry again, I shall cry."

"Oh, Lola, darling, dearie, sweetie, do lend me eight annas!" said Eulalie, putting her hands together in an attitude of supplication. "I must go to the Band to-night after dinner, and I have not one pice."

"But you owe me two rupees," rejoined Lola, in a sharp key.

"Yes, sweetie. I will pay—I will, indeed!—when I get my salary; I cannot pay till then: and *only* eight annas more!—only eight annas, darling!"

"I have not got it," was the curt reply; and Lola walked straight towards the door.

"Gwendoline, I know I need not ask you," said Eulalie.

Then she turned her lovely eyes imploringly on me; such eloquent eyes I had never seen. Yes, I had eight annas, and I handed it to her at once. Eight annas was the shilling of India; its value is now about eightpence, but it is a nice, respectable-looking silver coin. I had been barely two hours at Rosario's, and, in spite of my warning, I was already lending money, but only a small sum—and who could resist Eulalie's eyes?

CHAPTER XX

EULALIE DANCES A PAS SEUL

As we proceeded to dinner in double-quick time and in single file, I felt far more nervous and overwhelmed with shyness than had ever been my lot on board ship. There I was nothing remarkable, here I was supremely remarkable, as I happened to be the only white person present. I was sensible, through some indefinable instinct, that my arrival, appearance, and finances had been exhaustively discussed, and that every eye was fastened on me as I followed Eulalie and Gwendoline.

Mrs. Rosario, glorified in a very transparent muslin blouse, amber bead-necklace, and her face ghastly with powder, presided at the head of a long, narrow table (and the less said of the appointments and table-cloth the better). I had the place of honour on her right hand, whilst on her left sat a stout, dark, truculent-looking man of fifty, who wore a white drill suit and much jewelry: in him I beheld Frederick Augustus, or I was mistaken. We were a company of eighteen, chiefly young people; but I noticed a bent old woman and a worn and shrunken elderly man. The food was liberal, if not precisely dainty: stewed beef, curried dâl (as feared), plantain fritters, and native vegetables, turnipy "knolkolh" and sticky brinjalls

—neither of them to my taste. The assemblage ate fast, talked fast, and laughed immoderately—especially in the neighbourhood of Eulalie and Gwendoline. On my right hand I had a good-looking young Eurasian, with a small moustache, faultless collar, rings, and scent—in short, a dandy. Mrs. Rosario introduced him to me as her nephew, Fitz Alan Granville. "But we call him Fitz for short," she added, "and I am sure he will be pleased if you will do the same."

Fitz Alan smiled agreeably and displayed his faultless teeth, and then burst into fluent conversation. He talked enthusiastically about bicycling, and informed me that he had just purchased a new bike at Hadji Ismail Saits', and would recommend him strongly should I ever require one. But I shook my head emphatically; I wanted bread—not a bicycle. He discoursed incessantly of dancing, and of tennis, and of pretty girls.

"I suppose you know every one here?" I inquired, during a brief pause.

"Oh, yes. Why, the half of them are my relations." Here he flourished a handkerchief soaked in musk. "Lily is my cousin, and the girl over there with the red ribbon and plaits is Jocasta, my sister—she *is* a sharp one, I can tell you." Jocasta looked it. Her little dark eyes met mine like two needles when I happened to glance in her direction. "She is just fourteen, and goes to the Doveton College; she is very clever too, but in my opinion she's too clever by half, and knows every one's business, and has all the gossip of the bazaar at her finger-ends, like an old Tannyketch. She'll be very keen to know all about you—but mind you snub her." I mentally ratified a vow to this effect. "Those two young men

near her are the Van Ledes—both in Barry's house, drawing good salary. Would you like to come to the band to-night?—I shall be most happy to escort you."

As I hastened to decline this flattering proposal with civil thanks and excuses, I was abruptly interrupted by Frederick Augustus, who accosted me across the table. Hitherto he had scarcely opened his mouth, except to grumble at the food he put into it.

"And so I hear you have lost all your money, miss!"

"Not quite all," I answered coldly.

"Oh, even if you *had*, it would make no difference here!" and he jerked his head towards Mrs. Rosario, who was labouring away at the beef. "She has a lot that never pay one pice;" and he favoured some of the boarders with a long and significant glare. These guilty ones cast down their eyes uneasily, and gobbled their food—as if they feared immediate expulsion. I did not like Mr. Frederick Augustus's manner—in fact, neither the man nor the manners. He was evidently the rich relation who paid well and then grumbled and tyrannized. Possibly in me he saw yet another hanger-on, for he continued, "Paupers should go to the local Friend in Need Society, instead of settling down on this Friend in Need; we have too many paupers here already!"

"Oh my! Now, now, Frederick!" she remonstrated. "Do give over! Can't you let people alone?"

"Yes, I can, when they have cash," he answered rudely; and I must confess that I was not sorry to see some of the boarders rising from the table: I at once followed their example.

In a few minutes the company had dispersed—they

melted away in a most mysterious manner, almost like snow before the sun. I therefore sallied forth alone, in the anxious endeavour to breathe an atmosphere not laden with pomatum, patchouli, and stewed beef. I strolled across the large enclosure to a respectable distance from the bungalow, only to discover that I was the object of the undivided attention of several girls, who were viewing me over the neighbouring wall with a gaze that was both candid and embarrassing. Perhaps these were the Cardozos, who had lent me the cot, and were awaiting my formal acknowledgments? Well, they must, for the present, be satisfied with the language of the eye; and I resumed my solitary promenade. I watched from a distance an ancient landau carry away four girls brilliant in costume, and two young men to correspond; three followed on bicycles, and, with shrill screams and cries of "Oh my!" and "Awfullee!" the cavalcade swept down the ill-kept drive, and out of the gateless entrance, *en route* to the band. Meanwhile, I remained strolling about the compound in the moonlight, listening to the roar of the bazaar, the explosion of fireworks, and the distant boom of the surf. Once the faint note of a bugle recalled Bareda, but there was no other resemblance. Bareda stood within sight of the snows—on a fine clear morning they glimmered above the plains; here I "held my head to other stars" and walked in the hot, half-clothed tropics, the gorgeous south. Suddenly a gentle voice at my elbow startled me by saying—

"You are not afraid of snakes, are you? Better come on the avenue." It was the thin, elderly man who spoke: he was bare-headed, and smoking a cheroot. "You will find us a little mixed, and it is not what you are

used to; but we are not a bad set," he continued with a deprecating air.

"Oh, no, I'm sure of that," I hastened to assent.

"Rather happy-go-lucky, take it easy, enjoy life while you can." He had a low, pleasing voice. "Auntie sent me to ask you to come in out of the damp."

I found Mrs. Rosario enthroned on the verandah, in one of the cane chairs. She called out—

"Come along, Miss Ferrars, and keep me company. You and I are the only ones at home, so we must amuse one another." I sat down on the extreme edge of a chair, and she went on, "They have all gone out to the band on the Marina and a big nautch at the Luz—except Auntie Gam, who has gone to bed."

"She is very old, I suppose?"

"Oh, yess; she is my husband's aunt. She has no friends—they are dead. She has no money at all, and is always grumbling. It is hard to have no money, and to be old and full of pains."

"You have a good many boarders," I remarked.

"Um—yess. There is my brother John—I sent him for you. He is so clevar, oh my! and so often nearly very rich; but his schemes do not come off. I think he is too humble; he is always busy with some great idea thatt will pay, and make all our fortunes;" and she heaved a great sigh. "First it was gold crushing, then it was a new lamp, then a new soda-water bottle, now it is a patent punkah; he has a little place at the back where he works. Sometimes he is away for weeks, trying to do business. Lily is his daughter. She is clevar, you know; such a manager, wonderful at bargains. Really, when I hear her, I am quite a-shamed. She sells every

old bottle thatt will fetch one pice. She talks Tamil, oh, so fast! and looks after everybody; but she *is* a screw. She is expecting to pass soon and get her M.B., and go to Calcutta as lady doctor. She does not like Madras; she says 'too many relations here.' I do not know whatt I shall do when she goes. There is Jocasta —did you notice her with the plaits?"

"Yes; her brother pointed her out."

"But she is too young and giddy. Thatt child is all eyes, I tell you. She is a terrible spy; the big girls hate her." I was not surprised to hear it. "Fitz Alan is so different, so good and sweet-tempered. Poor boy, he is out of employment."

"Oh, is he?" I exclaimed with simulated interest.

"Yes. He had a berth with Bell and Brown, the skin importers; but when he asked for an increase of salary, they would not give it to him. He was only getting twenty-five rupees a month, and there is his brother on the railway gets fifty; so, as they would not increase it, he resigned."

"But was not that a pity?"

"Whatt could the poor boy do? He could not stay on when his brother was getting double."

"But perhaps his brother is more experienced?" I ventured to suggest.

This bold implication had a startling effect on the old lady, who instantly sat up as if worked by a spring, and, speaking with extraordinary excitement, replied—

"Fitz Alan is a very good boy. Whatt does it matter if he did not know the work at first? He can soon learn; he only wants teaching. Fitz Alan is very clevar." Seemingly, every one in this fortunate establishment was very clever.

It was evident that Fitz Alan was a favourite, and owed everything to his adoring aunt, from the cheroot he smoked, and the scent on his handkerchief, to such every-day necessities as board and lodging.

"Mardie girl, go to bed!" screamed Mrs. Rosario, as Mardie girl came and looked out upon us rather suspiciously. "She is a very nartee girl," said her aunt, fondly stroking her hair. "Go now to Chinna ayah, and she will give you a bit of nice sugar-cane, and you may sleep with *me*." But even this splendid inducement failed to stir Mardie, and she deliberately sat down and prepared to listen to our conversation. "She is here for the present," resumed Mrs. Rosario, accepting the position with unruffled equanimity. "Her mother was such a handsome girl; she married a sergeant, and was not on the strength, so he could not take her home. He never writes or sends money, and so his wife left Mardie here. Blanche is with my cousin; and she is studying to be a nurse. Oh, she is veree clevar."

"Are they *all* your relations, and not boarders?" I inquired.

"Oh, my gracious, no! Eulalie and Gwendoline and Lola and Rosamond are only friends. They pay when they can, poor girls! Frederick Augustus, the stout gentleman, he pays well. He is very wealthy; he is in Alexander's house, and much thought of; but he does grumble awfullee, though he has the best room, and my own chest of drawers. The two Van Lede boys are in Barry and Co. They are very steady, and so is young Aubrey de Vere Jones, who is in the telegraph. You would not care to go into thatt, would you?—it is quite genteel; and I am sure you are veree clevar."

"No; I wish, if possible, to be a governess or companion."

"Oh, yes. I'm afraid in Madras these ladies are not much required; but the hills will be the thing for you, or Bangalore—cold climate, and a pretty place."

"I am glad to hear it," I responded faintly.

"You will put a nice advertisement in the *Mail*—it will cost you two rupees; but then it will surely bring you a nice post. You must be very lonely, my dear Miss Ferrars, all away from your dear relations. What a trouble! How I peety you."

Something in the tone of her voice, and the sympathetic squeeze of her soft little hand, made me feel quite choky. *She* certainly had no reason to lament the absence of her relations. I had reckoned no fewer than six who were living on this good, kind woman!

"Do not sit up for those girls," she urged. "They will be late; you can go to your own bed, and I to mine. I will take you to your room first." There I beheld Mrs. Cardozo's cot drawn up in a line with the others. "I hope you will sleep," continued my hostess, doing the honours agreeably; "and do not mind the rats in the ceiling-cloth—they don't often fall through."

I shuddered from head to foot at the bare idea.

"You see, I got this house cheap, for it is dilapidated. The white ants are awful, and so are the rats; but I ask for no repairs, and they do not bother much about the rent; it was once very expensive—the finest in all Vepery." Then, raising her voice suddenly, she called, "Sawmy! Sawmy!—where is thatt boy? Bring the lamp." When Sawmy appeared, blinking and dishevelled, she said, "You need not sit up for those young ladies—they will

be late. Come, Mardie child, we will go to bed;" and, with a benevolent good-night, she and "Mardie" took their departure.

My bed was hard—a cane cot and thin cotton mattress. I pushed it into a remote corner, with an eye to the ceiling-cloth, and was soon fast asleep. It seemed to be already morning when I was awoke by a brilliant light, and discovered that my fellow-lodgers had returned. Lola was in bed; but Gwendoline and Eulalie were still up, and afoot.

"Oh, so you are awake!" cried Gwendoline, triumphantly. "We have had such fun! I wish you had been with us. After the band, we went on to a nautch and fireworks at the Luz; and Eulalie has made such a conquest—a real swell! My! how he did stare! He is far grander than the staff-sergeant with the curly hair who comes to our church, and he is a gentleman."

"What nonsense you are talking!" cried Eulalie, giving her a quick push. "Don't be so silly. Did you see Addie de Castro's hat? Oh my!"

"Yes, lovelee. What a style!"

"I could copy it to-morrow if I had the money, but I have not one pice. I owe—owe—owe truly ever so much, and only twenty-five rupees coming to me. I owe Auntie——"

"But *she* never bothers," interrupted Lola from her couch.

"No! but Lily does," retorted Gwendoline viciously.

"Oh, yes, that Lily is a regular Soucar girl. I owe at Oakes'; I am ashamed to go there. I owe Nubbie Bux in the Bazaar, and Narainsawmy in the Mount Road, and Abboy Chetty, and the Chukler, and the Dirzee.

Oh, nothing but debts, debts, debts!" and suddenly Eulalie began to dance about the room in her petticoats.

She made a most delightful picture with her thick cloud of rippling hair, her waving arms, lithe, graceful figure, and shapely, black-stockinged legs.

"Oh, how can you dance—and talk of debt?" expostulated Gwendoline in a lugubrious voice.

"Bah! I believe I was born in debt, and I am almost certain to die in debt. If I were to die now, what grief in the Bazaar!" and she laughed as she executed a marvellous *pas seul*. "Debt is a misfortune, not a crime;" and she blew a kiss to Lola, who was sitting up in bed nursing her knees.

"Eulalie Foneca, I believe you are mad," said Gwendoline gravely. "The rich financier—or whatever he is—has turned your brain."

"She has no brain to turn," remarked Lola calmly. "Did you hear that there is to be a grand subscription ball at the Victoria Rooms?" she continued, in a tone of suppressed importance.

"No!" shrieked Eulalie, twirling towards her. "Who said so?"

"Alonzo—and he is always right. I believe, if you are awfullee nice to Frederick Augustus, he will give us tickets—three rupees each, supper and all!"

Eulalie cut a caper, and then threw up her arms with a gesture of despair.

"No dress!"

"You can wear your yellow and white," said Lola.

"No"—indignantly; "it's in rags. I must have a new one"—and she reflected for a second—"a pink satin!"

"Pink satin you cannot have," objected Gwendoline; "it will cost a lot of money."

"I shall die if I do not have a pink satin—yes, and a feather in my hair."

"But you cannot get it," persisted her friend.

"You will see—you will see. I have some ways and means. I will get it from Sorabjee, the hawker—he can wait. I shall trim it——"

At this point I believe I fell asleep, leaving the penniless Eulalie still arranging the details of a magnificent ball toilette.

Thus ended my first day at Rosario's Boarding-house.

CHAPTER XXI

"NONE BUT A PURE EUROPEAN NEED APPLY"

I WAS aroused at an early hour, the following morning, by the voice of Mrs. Rosario shrieking at her milkman, who was evidently posted in close vicinity to the verandah. I raised myself on my elbow, looked out, and beheld four cows and four calves—but one of these was merely an image, the skin of the departed being stuffed with straw, and exhibiting sham legs of green bamboo, designed to deceive the bereaved parent, who was indeed a truly foolish animal if she believed that effigy of sticks and straw to be her offspring. An Indian cow is invariably attended by her calf—no calf, no milk. The milkman's head was muffled in a checked cloth, and he wore a venerable scarlet tunic with epaulettes, the cast-off uniform of some long-departed soldier; whilst Mistress Rosario, herself enveloped in a dingy wadded counterpane, was anxiously superintending his operations. I rose, leaving my three companions fast asleep, and had a bath. Every bedroom in the East has at least one bath-room adjoining, and I should have revelled in my cold tub in a rough half-barrel, but for the weird monstrosities and hairy spiders—creatures as large as crabs, with wormy

legs, which studded the low walls, and filled me with oathing and horror. As soon as I was dressed I unearthed my writing-case, and made a careful copy of an advertisement which I resolved to despatch to a local paper before I was many hours older. I think it was the horror of the creeping things in the bath-room which spurred me to action, and nerved my hand as I penned these lines:

"'As Governess to children, or housekeeper and companion to a lady, a young English girl seeks immediate employment. Good musician and linguist, can sew, and make herself useful. Terms moderate. Apply P. F., office of this paper.'"

Breakfast proved to be a glum and sober meal gobbled down in hasty silence, and immediately afterwards there was an exodus of almost all the boarders to their different schools, shops, and situations. I saw Jocasta flying across the compound, with red ribbons between her teeth, and plaiting her hair as she ran. When the great rush had somewhat subsided, I ventured to ask my way to the office of the best newspaper.

"Mr. Frederick Augustus is going," rejoined Mistress Rosario. "He will give you a lift with pleasure, and drop you at the door."

We are all aware that beggars cannot be choosers, and I could not afford to be particular, much less proud; so I accepted the great man's ungracious invitation with suitable humility. Fitz Alan, the idler, who was in waiting, ushered me forth to the gharry with a magnificent air; but Mr. Frederick rudely shouldered him aside and scrambled in, leaving me to follow and accept the seat with my back to the horse,—and thus we trundled down,

an uncongenial *vis-à-vis*, to the office of the *Madras Mail*.

My errand proved to be vain. Day after day I looked out eagerly for the postman with his great leather wallet (to carry the V.P.P. parcels), but he never brought anything for me. "It was the bad time of year," Mistress Rosario assured me, "and it would be all right if I would wait and push along." This was the same as saying, "Live, horse, and you'll get grass." The advertisement had swallowed up ten of my precious rupees. I had only twenty remaining, for Eulalie, the irresistible, had borrowed repeatedly, and, alas! never repaid me.

I speedily fell into the routine of the boarding-house, and made myself useful in various ways. I took charge of Auntie Gam, compounded her cunjee (gruel) and cocoa, listened to her grievances and to endless stories of the glories of old Madras, and the brilliant days of her youth and conquests. How far away those days seemed! I could hardly realize that this bent, shrivelled, toothless old creature had ever been young or beautiful. Some day, some one would probably have the same doubts respecting me. "Youth burns forth so radiant, then vanishes, swallowed of the night." Auntie Gam was partial to ghost stories, and related a truly fearsome tale of the house in Perambore, where a native woman in a green saree appeared at a certain window with her throat cut. She told me many details of Mrs. Rosario's married life, and of how, once upon a time, "Eglantine" had been the beauty of Blacktown, and could, had she pleased, have married a rich coffee-planter up in Mysore; but she had been a silly, silly girl.

Besides ministering to Auntie Gam, I watered the

neglected flowers, and gathered a few, which I introduced into the drawing-room and also at table. I dusted, I mended, I heard Mardie's spelling—I also heard complaints of Jocasta's lies, Gwendoline's coquetries, and Eulalie's extravagance. There were, moreover, whispers of Lily's stinginess and Fitz Alan's airs; and if I poured water on the thirsty flowers, it was also my daily task to pour oil upon the troubled waters and intrigue for peace. I was an early riser, and was often awake when the clamour of the crows and the gradual flushing of the sky proclaimed the approach of dawn. At first I roamed on foot. I visited the ancient fort and St. Mary's Church—the oldest in India. I explored the island, and penetrated to the Cathedral, the shady road of banyan trees, and to old Saint Thomé, formerly a Portuguese fortress. On the sea-front I liked to watch the boiling surf and the catamarans, and once I enjoyed a storm—it afforded such an invigorating contrast to the sleepy, stuffy atmosphere at Crundall's Road. I stood by the beach, contemplating the bursting waves, listening to the roar of the surf and the mad, screaming wind; and I made some longer expeditions when Rosamond—who was an indolent, good-natured girl—lent me her bicycle. Then I went down the dusty Mount Road as far as Guindy, the Mamalong bridge, the quaint, old-fashioned Mount, and beyond it to Palaveram, with its stretching plains and shady avenues, once the headquarters of the army of John Company.

In spite of the red dust, these early morning excursions about old Madras were delightful, and helped me to bear up against depression, disappointment, and the long, empty hours of the long Indian day.

Of an evening, I frequently played dances on an old

rattletrap of a piano picked up years previously at Frank's Auction Rooms. I much preferred playing to careering around in the embrace of Fitz Alan or the Van Lede boys, and my playing obliged the girls and Mrs. Rosario.

I now undertook part of Lily's work—she was so busy preparing for her examination, and Mrs. Rosario had no time to spare from looking after her cows and poultry. She was absolutely devoted to both, and a certain Mysore heifer and a Chittagong cock with curly feathers were her especial idols. She rarely left the house except on Sundays, when the whole of the inmates paraded to church at St. Mathias, Vepery, decked out in their brightest and best; and what quantities of musk, and hair-oil, and pearl powder were lavished that day!

The household were all more or less devout. The young people invariably attended evening service, and joined heartily in the singing. They were regular attendants, for reasons not entirely devotional. It was at church that Eulalie sat among many admirers; and church was as much a resort for seeing their friends—and their friends' clothes—as the park or the beach.

I had only once been to the band on the Marina, making the fifth in a small gharry. The other four descended to promenade, but I preferred to remain where I was. I watched the girls, Fitz Alan, and their associates—most of whom I knew—giggling and chattering and passing to and fro; also the Europeans, smart society people, officers and their wives from the fort, and the civil element from Nunkumbaukum and the Adayar—my own class, from whom I now felt a complete outcast. It was a painful experience, which I

never repeated. I preferred in the future to stroll about some long-deserted native infantry lines at the back of the bungalow, or to sit in the compound reading.

One evening Fitz Alan, who was also seeking an "appointment," as he was pleased to call it, drew my attention to an advertisement which he thought might be in my line. It said: "Wanted, for the hills, a nursery governess to three children. Ayah kept, terms moderate. None but a pure European need apply to Mrs. Smith, Cannanore Hotel, Madras."

My heart leaped with joy as I read the above. Here was my opportunity, and I would repair to the Cannanore Hotel without delay.

I showed the advertisement to Mrs. Rosario, who sighed as she handed me back the paper, and said—

"My dear, they will jump at you; and whatt a loss to me! But of course you must push along and get on."

As soon as the tide of boarders had ebbed the next morning, I attired myself in my most sympathetic frock, and hied forth to the Cannanore Hotel, Mount Road, in a second-class gharry, and when I reached my destination commanded it—a piece of reckless extravagance—to wait. I entered the hotel, where a smart Portuguese "boy" conducted me to the drawing-room, saying, "The lady is there." He appeared to take my errand for granted, and I believe I owed my prompt reception to my smart English gown (trousseau again). I looked around a large, lofty sitting-room, seemingly all white curtains, marble tables, and mirrors, and discovered an elaborately dressed elderly lady, with a sandy fringe and gold glasses, buried

in an arm-chair and a novel. I glanced at her, and she stared very hard at me.

"Are you Mrs. Smith?" I asked at last. "I have come about the situation as nursery governess."

"Nursery governess?" she repeated; and she raised her sandy eyebrows. "Oh dear no; I'm an old maid. I do not require one. I know nothing about your Mrs. Smith. This is the general sitting-room. Better ask;" and she resumed her book.

I took her advice at once, and in a short time a woman with a good deal of Sawmy jewelry, a long chin, and a pair of eyes resembling two jet beads, appeared, and transfixed me with a stare.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "the young person about the situation, I suppose?"

"Yes," I assented gravely. It was not a case of love at first sight.

"You may sit down. What is your name?" and she coolly inspected me from the top bow on my hat to the hem of my dress.

"Ferrars," I replied, with a rather dry tongue.

"Any experience?"

"I was companion to a lady for two months."

"Are you fond of children?"

"I—I—think I am," I answered, "but I have not had much to do with them."

"Are you musical—good music?"

"Yes; and I can speak German fluently."

"Oh! And you can sew and cut out, and are willing to be useful?"

"Yes, quite willing."

"Well, I have two girls of seven and nine, and a boy

of four. I don't want to send them home—exchange is ruinous; and I thought a governess out here would suit. What is your age?"

"I was twenty-one last December."

"Oh, you look much older. And your religion?"

"Church of England."

"What brought you out here?"

"Does that affect the question?"

"Certainly," she snapped.

"I came out to be married."

"Oh, indeed!" she stared interrogatively.

"And it did not come off."

"That's unusual. Have you no friends in the country?"

"No." I could not call Mr. Thorold my friend.

"I really wonder you don't go home. Father and mother alive?"

"No; they died when I was a small child."

"What are your terms?"

"I was thinking of asking fifty pounds a year and washing," I faltered.

Mrs. Smith gave a loud, insolent laugh. "Pray don't think of it. I intend to offer you twenty-four rupees a month"—what Fitz Alan had scorned.

"You will be in the hills—a great advantage; you will have the children always, with an ayah under you. Of course you will take your meals with them, teach them, accompany them out walking, and mend their clothes. There must be no mistake about all these details."

Certainly this was not a very tempting offer.

"Well, what do you say?" tapping her foot on the floor with exasperating urgency.

"I should like to consider it," I replied cautiously.

"Oh, really!"—and she sniffed. "Of course you have a reference from your last place?"

"No; the lady left at two days' notice for Japan, and my letters and money were stolen on my way to Madras."

"Surely you know some one in India?"

"My chief friend is dead, her husband has gone to England. There are others I would not appeal to."

"The young man's relations, of course," she interrupted rudely.

I felt myself colouring, and was silent.

"Then, it simply comes to this—that you have no reference;" and she pushed her chair back as she spoke.

"I have plenty in England, if you would only wait—or trust me. I expect a recommendation from Mr. Evans every mail. He is in the Forest Department at Lohara. His wife was my friend; she died suddenly, and he has gone home. Meanwhile," I added, goaded by the recollection of my empty purse and of the non-paying guests at Crundall's Road, "I assure you that I will do my best to give you satisfaction—and I am quite respectable."

"Ah, bah!" she jeered, with a curl of her lip; "that is what every adventuress says."

"Madame!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, you need not madame me. *I* know your type—a good-looking, well-dressed English girl, who has got into a scrape out here, and has a cock-and-bull story about a marriage, a disappointment, and no references; and wants to creep back into decent society through the doors of my nursery. Oh, no, you don't."

I was so utterly confounded by this cruel speech, that

I was unable to utter one word; my lips were trembling to such an extent that I could not frame a syllable.

"And now that I look at you," she resumed, "I recollect seeing you with some loud, flaunting half-castes. English girls don't live with such companions—girls of good character."

"My character is spotless," I cried. "How dare you say such things, you wicked woman!"

"Wicked woman yourself!" she retorted. "Why, that dress of yours must have cost a hundred rupees!" and, with a sniff expressive of shuddering propriety, she got up and walked out of the room, leaving me trembling with fury.

As I stood, struggling hard for composure, a shrill old voice called out—

"Come over here."

It belonged to the other lady, whom I had utterly forgotten.

"I am going home," she continued, as I turned and looked at her. "I've been globe-trotting—though you might not think it. If I had been staying out here I might have engaged you as companion, you young spitfire!—I like your spirit. Why do you mind what that cad woman said?"

"I did mind," I stammered; "any girl would mind. I —I—could have struck her."

"Yes, I dare say; or scratched her face—the primeval instinct. What is your name? I did not catch it."

"Ferrars—Pamela Ferrars," I answered reluctantly.

"Eh?" in a high, sharp key, suddenly letting her book fall on the floor. "Yes, of course, that is why the face is so familiar. You have the Tregar hair and spirit."

For a moment she seemed overwhelmed. This plain, elderly woman had grown exceedingly white, her lips worked convulsively. "Sit down, child," she said at last, "and tell me all about yourself."

"No; why should I?" I answered defiantly. I had had more than enough of strangers' questions for one day.

"Because I can give you an excellent reason. In me you see a forlorn, childless old woman—an old maid, a rich old maid. I am Lady Elizabeth Tregar, your cousin; and once I was to have been your father's wife. How strange that here, out in the far East, I should stumble on his daughter. You might have been *my* daughter," she added, and her ugly little eyes were dim. "I've no belongings but an arbitrary cousin who travels with me, and I'm just waiting here for the steamer. I've been doing the tour in this wonderful country—and now, Pamela Ferrars, what are *you* doing here? Pray sit down, and don't stand towering over me like that."

"I came out to be married to a man I'd known when we were neighbours, years ago. His mother and my aunt were anxious, and I was not wanted at home; so I came to India, and found——" I hesitated.

"What?" she asked sharply.

"That he was a fraud. I refused to marry him, though the wedding-day was fixed and everything prepared."

"Just as your father served me!" she interrupted sharply; "it's hereditary. Well, and then what happened next? Of course, all his people and yours were charmed, and overwhelmed you with applause and sympathy?"

"No; they were furious, and, as I had no money, I

tried to get a situation. It was only temporary; the lady went to Japan, and I was coming here, intending to return home second-class, but was robbed, and compelled to go to a cheap boarding-house, and again look for employment."

"And are still looking, I see;" and she surveyed me steadily. "I'll tell you what to do—come home with me at once. I'll pay your passage; *I* will befriend you."

For a moment I was too surprised to answer. At last I said—

"Lady Elizabeth, you are very kind, but I could not accept such a favour from you."

"Pray, why not?" looking at me fixedly with her faded eyes.

"Because — because——" — the words stuck in my throat, but pride forced them forth—"you know the reason."

"Yes; the sins of the father are visited on the children. Well, have it so; you have the Ferrars face, the Tregar pride, and you will probably end your days as a sort of drudge in some God-forsaken tea estate. Do not then think bitterly of this day and the offer of a friendless old woman."

She was angry, her voice vibrated as if she were uttering a curse.

"I shall never forget your kindness, wherever I may be," I answered tremulously.

"Pray, where are you now?" she asked curtly.

"At Rosario's Boarding-house, Crundall's Road, Vepery."

She scribbled it down on the leaf of her novel, and then said—

"I may be able to assist you indirectly. I have friends out here, and can pass you on to them—or is your independence too great to receive any favour, and to accept the offer of a helping hand?"

"No, indeed; if I only had one hand to cling to, one friend, I should——"

"You think you'd make many," she interposed—"eh? Your face and figure would be a terrible snare if you were giddy or weak; but you seem to have a firm will and a sharp tongue. What are your plans?—stiff-necked independence for the present, marriage in the future?"

"I shall never marry," I announced with resolution. "I am not a marrying girl. I hope to be able to earn my bread and help my fellow-creatures."

"A grand and lofty ideal, which leaves poor human nature out of the question. Well, I am going to lunch at Government House, and so I must dress and send you away now. Be sure and come and see me to-morrow morning."

"My lady, the carriage is waiting," announced a smart Portuguese with watch and chain—really not a whit darker than Fitz Alan.

And immediately afterwards a very tall, overpowering woman rustled in, all feathers and chiffon, and gave me a half look, as she said—

"Dearest Elizabeth, not dressed! We shall be so late, and you know they will wait for *you*;" and hustled the old lady away.

But before she was carried off, Lady Elizabeth gave me her hand, and said—

"Kiss me, my dear, and be sure and come to-morrow."

Her companion looked for a moment as if turned to

stone, but promptly recovered and returned to the charge; and with waving feathers, rustling silks, and tinkling bangles, led Lady Elizabeth away in order to fulfil her social duties.

My gharry was still waiting under a banyan tree, the driver asleep on the roof, the horse dozing. In answer to my summons he came flogging to the entrance, and I was carried back to Crundall's Road with no prospect of a situation and with a splitting headache. Here I discovered Mistress Rosario seated in the verandah in her usual happy condition of placid immobility.

"Well!" she bawled, "good news for you, and bad for me? You go?"

"No," I answered rather hysterically; "I am back like the proverbial bad penny. The place would not answer."

"Oh my! Why not?"

"A great deal of work—teaching and sewing for three children, music, English, languages, and twenty-five rupees a month."

"Oh, the cheek of some people—offering *you* thatt!"

"My references were not sufficient. I have none out here, and so there was an end to it; but I may have another opening. There was an old lady at the hotel who knew my people; I am to go and see her to-morrow."

"Ah, she is sure to help you; and I shall be sorry, for you help me;" and she squeezed my arm with two soft fingers, and suffered me to pass to my den.

As Lady Elizabeth had not mentioned any special hour, I did not venture to call until about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I heard that Lady Elizabeth Tregar and the Hon. Vivian Minever and maids had left at ten o'clock that morning for England.

"Was there no note or card?" I questioned anxiously.

"I will inquire of the boy Emmanuel," said the Baboo.

The boy Emmanuel came down, showing his beautiful double row of white teeth.

"No, miss; they were rather hurried. I am not aware of any note, or card, or message."

So much for Lady Elizabeth and her proffered helping hand.

CHAPTER XXII

A SITUATION

WEEKS dragged by sluggishly, but brought no answer to my advertisement, and as I paced the burnt-up grass of the old ruined lines behind Crundall's Road I asked myself angrily, "Why had I not accepted that benevolent offer to take me back to England and befriend me? What! to live on the bounty of a woman whom my father had jilted!" clamoured pride. "Never! Was it not because of her and her poignant wrongs that every Tregar and Ferrars had turned their back for ever on my parent?" And was I to be launched among these people as her *protégée*? No, anything rather than that; even the "Friend in Need Society," whose quarters I felt assured must yet become my refuge. On the other hand, an anxious voice assured me that "poor people had no right to be proud—it was a possession far too costly." Only for my pride, I should now be in London, and possibly in the lap of luxury, instead of in this tumble-down, ant-eaten boarding-house in Vepery, with an empty pocket and no prospects. Yes; I had come to my last coin. I had given Chinna ayah two of my best dresses to sell to the wives of soldiers in the fort; they had cost fifteen

pounds, and she only brought me fifteen rupees. I could barely manage to pay for one more week. I saw Frederick the Great considering me with taciturn solemnity. Eulalie had ceased to borrow, saying, "Poor dear! I know you are as hard up as I am," and Lily had become suddenly both brusque and shrill. Were they all wondering how soon I, the stranger, would sink to the level of my surroundings and live upon Mrs. Rosario's open-handed charity? There was no time to be lost. I must face the situation and tell her the truth; and one evening, as we sat together in the verandah, the house empty as usual, the boarders dispersed to different amusements, I plunged headlong into the subject.

"Mrs. Rosario," I began, "I have something most particular to say to you."

"Well, my dear, whatt is it? Have you had an offer of marriage?" and she seized my hand excitedly.

"No; no offer of any sort. I have not found a situation, you see, and I have spent all my money. I shall have none coming in for eighteen months, for I had some advanced. My people at home are angry with me—my acquaintance out here the same—for I came to India to be married, and I refused to marry the man at the eleventh hour."

"Oh, my gracious goodness!" she ejaculated. "Whatever did you do thatt for?"

"Because I did not like him," I answered forcibly.

"Well, well—better no husband than a bad one. My husband was not a very nice man."

"I cannot pay, you see," I pursued, "and I cannot remain here."

"Why not?" she inquired in placid amazement. "Some

don't pay for months, some never pay at all. It does not trouble them—or me. You stay;" and she put her hand on mine caressingly.

"No, I cannot," I replied. "It is very good of you to ask me. There is a place for poor Europeans, the Friend in Need Society. I will go there. I must humble myself, and apply to my aunt to lend me money for my passage; and if she sends it, I return to England, where there are plenty of openings for an educated girl."

"You do not like to humble your pride, do you?" she asked softly, and her eyes said great things.

"No; anything rather than that," I rejoined with emphasis.

"Then, lovey, since you are looking for a situation, it is here. I can offer you a post, and you can keep your pride. Now, listen to me. Thatt girl Lily will be going in two weeks. How am I to fill her place? I am not equal to this business, this house and servants—the servants are devils, thatt you know—and I must get another girl. Now, why not you stay? I like you; you like me. You go to bazaar and keep the books. Come, now, I will give you a little room to yourself, and twenty rupees a month and dhoby. You will save me all thatt."

"Oh, Mrs. Rosario, you are extremely kind," I stammered; but this was not exactly the kind of situation of which I was in quest. However, as I have already quoted, "Beggars cannot be choosers." The motto might have been invented to suit my case. She was holding my hand in her soft little paw and squeezing it impressively, maybe precisely as some young man had pressed hers when she was the beauty of Blacktown.

"And if ever you get a better appointment, you shall

go at once," she resumed. "No, I will not stand in your way; you are sure to get a fine post some day—and meanwhile this is your home."

Here she put her arms round my neck and kissed me with effusion on either cheek, leaving two little floury patches as her sign and seal.

"You are very good to me, Mrs. Rosario. How can I thank you?" I exclaimed.

"I like you, my dear; I always liked you. Think of me now as your mother."

"Only, I never saw my mother."

"Then, as your aunt." If my aunt, the thin little aristocrat, had but seen her dark and bulky substitute! Well, whatever Mrs. Rosario looked, her heart was beautiful, and she had given me a place in it.

"Very well, thatt is all settled. Lily will be glad—she wants the time. Oh, she is such a screw, thatt Lily; she counts the potatoes, and rows us all. Oh, she will get on; she has the tongue of a tannyketch. We are all afraid of Lily;" and she laughed good-humouredly.

Yes; Lily was going away. She had passed, and secured her M.B. She wished to go to Calcutta, in order to be out of reach of her relations. Fitz Alan had condescended to thirty rupees a month. Mr. John had obtained a contract for old kerosene tins, and *I* was the only useless one left.

It did not take me very long to learn the keys, the amount of food required, the cheapest shops, the servants' wages and duties, and the quantity of oil required, and the wood and charcoal for the kitchen. We employed a cook, ayah, tannyketch (kitchenmaid), and Sawmy (man-of-all-work). I was also initiated into the "boarders' book." I

knew now who paid to the day, who rarely paid at all, who never.

Also, like the proverbial new broom, I inaugurated sweeping reforms. I enlisted a share of a mallee for the garden. I paid cash as much as possible, and I encountered many frightful shocks from large running bills. I insisted on clean table-cloths, flowers, punctuality, and I inspired the cook. In fact, I was extremely busy, and felt all the better for employment. I gave "Mardie girl" music lessons. Once, when I asked her why she was not at school, but always idling about, "I don't know," she replied, with a giggle and a shrug.

"Yes, you do, Mardie," interposed her aunt. "Oh, my Pamella! whatt trouble these children are. Mardie won't go to school because she was not promoted last term. Teacher says she cannot be promoted, but I don't know why. Oh, these teachers, they promote just those they please! Mardie girl ought to have had a prize at Christmas, but they would not give her one."

It was my private opinion that Mardie's school fees went to pay for Fitz Alan's new bicycle. He was Mrs. Rosario's favourite, next to the Mysore cow, and she grudged him nothing; and Mardie's education was postponed on account of his pleasure. I discovered, as time went on, that Lily had received many bribes, small but regular, from the charcoal man, the butcher, and the grocer; also that she made a "good thing" out of waste-paper, old bottles, and bones, and carried away a nice purse, privately presented, when she went north. I must candidly state that I should not like to be one of Lily's patients.

As it was now my turn to go to the bazaar, and buy and chaffer in English (not Tamil), I did not succeed in

effecting Lily's brilliant bargains; but then, I made no secret profits: and with nine paying guests, I managed to carry on the concern with triumphant success. "Rosario's" was quoted as a fashionable place, with an English lady-housekeeper, and was quite cutting out "Chambers's," the rival establishment at No. 29—in fact, we had more applicants than we could accommodate. Eulalie and Gwendoline had long eclipsed the belles of Chambers's House, and our airs and our prosperity threw it entirely into the shade.

What with marketing, over-seeing, dusting, and teaching "Mardie girl," I had but little spare time; and when I lay down at night on my hard, narrow cot, I was fairly worn out. It was true that I enjoyed a room to myself, but I was liable to constant incursions from the gay trio, Rosamond, Gwendoline, and Eulalie: whenever they had a piece of news to impart, a new garment to display, or were going to a dance, I was invariably summoned to play the part of adviser, admirer, and lady's-maid. I must confess that I liked to see them in full war-paint, Eulalie looking bewilderingly lovely in the pink—unpaid-for—satin. She wore pink shoes too, as well as the promised pink feather, and I was not unconscious of her train of adorers, nor wholly unprepared when Gwendoline bounded into my room one evening, flung herself on my bed, and said—

"Eulalie has made a great conquest at last!"

"At last!" I echoed; "why, it is an every-day occurrence!"

"No, no, no," snapping her thin fingers native fashion; "not the usual lot with no money, only sergeants and clerks and conductors, but a real gentleman, who drives his carriage and pair, a beautiful Stanhope phaeton. He

is of noble family, Mr. Nazar Ibrahim, with the royal blood of Persia in his veins; he does business in precious stones, and he is also a chemist, and has taken his degree as Doctor in Edinburgh."

"It sounds most promising," I said.

"Oh, yes. I noticed him this long time at the band watching Eulalie, and walking so as to meet her face to face. Of course, Eulalie is the prettiest girl in Vepery."

"Prettiest in Madras," I amended with decision.

"Well, you may be right; he—Ibrahim—got introduced to her at the ball, and he is madly in love. He sends her sweets and scent and lovely notes. She is a funny girl. She is not one bit stuck up, nor proud. She says she does not care for him; no, not one pin. She is sure to come and tell you herself, or Jocasta will; that horrid child knows everything. He is getting most particular, and wants to board here; but Eulalie keeps him off. She likes the curly-haired sergeant far better, and she is a great fool."

"And what is Mr. Ibrahim like?" I inquired indifferently.

"Dark, and very handsome; rather small, with a blue chin and sharp nose, and black eyes that burn like coal and pierce you. However, thank Goodness, he never looks at *me*—though, in a way, he sees everything. He is in Madras on business; he travels often to Bombay and Delhi and Europe. He is bothering to be asked here. He offers Eulalie drives and gloves and scent. She will take them, especially the drives, because it will make the Chambers girls so wild to see her in a fine carriage; but she won't take *him*, I'm afraid."

At this moment Eulalie rushed in, looking brilliantly

beautiful in a rose-coloured cotton and a rose-coloured straw hat with large black bows.

"So, here you are!" to her friend; then, turning to me, "I suppose Gwendoline has been grumbling to you? She wants me to make what she calls a grand match, but I will not—I will not," and she laughed gaily, and clapped her little hands. "No, I will not—I will not."

"Why, you are awfully poor; you will not always be pretty. At twenty-five you will be fat and have three chins," was Gwendoline's gloomy prophecy.

"At any rate, I am not fat now," she retorted indignantly.

"You can pay your debts," urged her friend.

"Yes, and yours too, if you are good; but I am not going to marry for that;" and she shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"Why, you mad girl, do you object to such a superb match?"

"There is sulphur about it somewhere. He is too cold, too clever, too old; I hate his eyes, and when he squeezes my hand I go goose-flesh all over. Of course, he is wild, raving mad, about me now; but after a bit, when I come to the three-chin age, he might not be so pleasant. He is awfully polite, but I've seen him scowl at his ghorawallahs, and I'm certain that he is over thirty; besides, he may have half-a-dozen wives in Persia." Then, glancing over at the looking-glass, "No, I'm very pretty. Why should I sell my pretty face? I would rather marry a poor man for love. Give me young Melville's little finger in preference to this rich noble doctor and all his rupees and jewels."

"What nonsense, Eulalie!" screamed her friend.

"Melville has only thirty rupees a month—barely enough to keep himself, much less you, with your dress and your debts. What will you live on?"

"Oh, love," was her prompt answer,—"and I love Melville."

"Do you mean to marry him?" demanded Gwendoline.

"No, not yet; I mean to have a little play. I'm only seventeen." She looked twenty. "They all want to marry me since they have seen me in the pink satin—ha! ha! ha! old Frederick, Fitz Alan, Eustace Grove—oh, ever so many; and I won't give any of them an answer. Oh my, it is fun!" and she tore off her hat and flung it at my head.

"Well, Eulalie," I said, "I wish you'd carry on your devastations elsewhere than here. We shall have a war, and shall lose our men."

"Not at all; I bring them. Ethelred Jones and Reginald Warren are coming as soon as possible. Mr. Ibrahim would come too, if I would hold up my finger."

"I beg you won't hold up your finger; this is no place for a grand gentleman who sees everything."

"No; he'd soon see that the meat was second-class. He might carry me off, and sell me to some great Nawab. Oh, I forgot, Mrs. Josephs and her daughters are all sitting in the verandah. They have come over to ask us to a dance, and to borrow the chairs and lamps and *you*."

"Oh, I dare say; but I'm not going to be borrowed."

"But darling, sweetie, dearie, lovey, you must come and play for me to dance, and to see me dance. I dance like a moonbeam on the water, so I've been told by Ibrahim. Come, I was sent to bring you out;" and she put her arm round my waist, and dragged me forth.

Mrs. Josephs was the most important of Mrs. Rosario's many acquaintances. Her husband had held a Government appointment, and she never allowed this pre-eminence to be forgotten. She had two hopelessly plain daughters, and lived in a comfortable bungalow in good repair on the Poonamallee Road. Mrs. Josephs had come to invite me to her dance, as well as all the other young people. "Just a little friendly hop," she said politely, and hoped that I would bring my music.

"You do play so beautifullee," she added, with bland condescension.

"Oh, yes, of course she will go and take her music," said Mrs. Rosario,—"Miss Ferrars never will go out except to church,—and I insist on it. Why should she not be gay? Pamella, you *must* be gay."

But Mrs. Josephs did not wish me to be gay, only to be the cause of gaiety in others, and to play the piano for her guests. Why should I save her purse? I glanced at Eulalie, whose eyes spoke agonies of supplication. Well, yes, I should like to see her dancing in the pink satin, and I accorded a somewhat cool assent.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. IBRAHIM

"A LITTLE hop" was evidently a mere *façon de parler*, since Mrs. Josephs had issued invitations for a ball. We gathered this much from discussions at table—and that many young men from different houses, and most of the girls in Vepery, had received cards.

"Rosario's" contributed eight guests—and my music; and it was repeatedly asserted by our partial landlady that "her lot would cut out everybody."

As I adorned for the function, and surveyed myself in a cheap looking-glass—purchased in the thieving bazaar, a wonderful place for bargains—I was aware that these last few months had impaired my looks. My face was thin, my colour had departed, as Mrs. Blasson had prophesied; however, my hair was still bright and plentiful, and I spent some time over my toilet, arranging it in the latest fashion. How strange and unexpected that my first ball in India, or indeed elsewhere, should be a dance among the Eurasians, where I was to supply the music! At last we were all ready, and flocked out into the verandah in order to be inspected by Mrs. Rosario, who assumed the post of candid critic as she sat

in her broken cane chair, minus stockings, whilst Sawmy held aloft our best and biggest lamp. "Oh, yess, you will cut them all out," she once more declared; and I was of the same opinion as I watched Lola, Josephine, Gwendoline, and Eulalie pass gravely before her. However cheap and tawdry their gowns might appear in cold daylight, they were smart and becoming now; their bodices fitted them to perfection, as did their gloves. Where had these girls acquired such taste? Perhaps from France, *viâ* Pondicherry? If there was any detail at which I felt inclined to cavil, it was the too liberal display of pearl powder. Eulalie was the flower of that brilliant little flock, and was further distinguished by a superb bouquet with long satin streamers.

"Ibrahim sent it just now in a box," whispered Jocasta in my ear; "and——"

"Now come along, Pamella," cried Mrs. Rosario, "and let's look at you, child."

"Come on the band," added Lola, with a giggle.

I wore a black gown, a little necklace of seed pearls, and carried in my hand a painted fan, a poor remnant of Ferrars greatness.

"Oh my—in black!" exclaimed Mrs. Rosario, whose pet colour was a violent orange; and there ensued an expressive pause—no one spoke, they all stood round, whilst Sawmy held aloft the lamp at a dangerous angle. I noticed surprise in his eyes, and Jocasta's mouth was half open. Does dress really work such wonders?

"Oh my!" repeated Mrs. Rosario; "well—well—well! You are wonderful, with your white throat and arms. But beauty is the gift of God," she added with a pious sigh.

"I'll tell you what it is, Pamela," said Eulalie suddenly: "you look as if you ought to be stepping into a splendid carriage and going to Government House, instead of squeezing into a second-class gharry and starting for a dance among *our* class."

"Yess," agreed Mrs. Rosario; "any one would swear thatt Pamella was a great lady."

"And they would be wrong, as you know," I retorted—"looks are deceitful. Please give me my music, Jocasta. Sawmy, take care of the lamp, and tell the cook to bring hoppers for breakfast."

"How I wish I was going!" cried Jocasta. "When I am grown up next year, oh, won't I flirt! won't I have fun!"

"Enjoy yourselves, girls, enjoy yourselves!" shrieked Mrs. Rosario; and in a few minutes we were all packed into the crazy gharry, and drove off, leaving the trio on the verandah, still illuminated by the drawing-room lamp.

The Josephs' bungalow presented a very animated appearance as we waited our turn, wedged in among other vehicles. Chinese lamps and screens, discreetly arranged, seats in pairs, furnished the verandah. We were graciously received by Mrs. Josephs, in crimson and beetles' wings, and her daughters in orange. I noticed among the crowd many sallow, bashful youths standing in doorways, and dozens of pretty, giggling, dark-eyed girls, as well as various large and gorgeous matrons. The piano had been placed across a corner, and I walked over and took my place before the instrument at once, and proceeded to arrange my music. I could see over the top by elongating my neck; and as I gathered that my arrival was timely, I struck into a popular waltz. This brought the company pouring

in; couple after couple began to circulate; and certainly Eulalie's dancing had not been overpraised—anything more graceful I had never witnessed; it was the poetry of motion, it was light as moonbeams on the water. I watched her as she waltzed with young Melville, and I could see that she had all the gifts and arts of the supreme coquette. I observed Fitz Alan superb in glossy shirt and precise tie, buttonhole, and white gloves. He had only arrived at this pitch of perfection after hours of happy dressing. Frederick, prosperous and portly, wheeling round with one of the orange dresses. Jan van Lede dancing with a rival Chambers girl. How dared he! Waltzes, a set of lancers, a galop, a mazurka, then more waltzes; the dust was now rivalling the Mount Road itself. By-and-by I noticed a well-groomed, slender, dark man, to whom Mrs. Josephs was speaking with slavish *empressement*. This must be Ibrahim, the financier, for his eyes wandered around in search of Eulalie, who was making Fitz Alan happy. What eyes they were!—long, black, and half closed, but the pupils gleamed forth like the blade of a knife. He was possibly thirty-five years of age, had an olive skin, well-cut features, and a small black moustache. Yes, Ibrahim was undeniably handsome, and would have passed without question as an Italian or a Greek. His manners appeared to be unconstrained, and he wore one blazing solitaire stud—a badge of his profession. He spoke to Eulalie as she floated by, and she threw him back a saucy answer; he danced with her repeatedly, with Gwendoline, with Miss Josephs; he danced admirably, and I could see that he considered himself much above his company—and that the company were proud of the fact.

At the end of two hours' incessant exertion, I ceased to play. My arms were stiff and aching, my fingers were as wood. I was overwhelmed with praise and thanks by the couples in my vicinity, and at last I stood up from behind the instrument. As I did so I met Ibrahim's gaze point-blank; it sprang at me, and seized me as if it were a wild animal. His long, narrow eyes had opened to an unusual extent, and were fixed on me with an expression that I could neither analyze nor tolerate. I agreed with Gwendoline: his eyes were hateful. Well, I was probably the only woman of white parentage among that large assembly; and perhaps I looked, as Eulalie had declared, "a great lady."

Hence his surprise. I returned his bold stare with outward composure, surveying him slowly and deliberately between the eyes. Already I disliked this handsome, olive-skinned financier with the royal blood of Persia in his veins. To my extreme annoyance, he came straight across the room, and politely requested Mrs. Josephs to present him to me.

"This is Mr. Ibrahim, Miss Ferrars—Miss Ferrars, who has been awfullee kind in playing for us," announced our hostess.

"And who, I am sure," said Ibrahim, bowing low, "is in great need of refreshment after her delightful labours. Will you"—turning to me—"allow me the honour of conducting you to the supper-room?"

I hesitated for a second—no, there was no loophole—and then I inclined my head. He put out his arm, and I laid the tips of my fingers on his sleeve, and we walked away together through a double line of spectators. Ibrahim was *the* guest, and I was the sensation of the evening!

Hitherto I had been unseen behind the piano; now I had burst upon the astonished company, and I believe every one was clamouring to know where on earth the English girl had come from? The inevitable answer was, "Rosario's," and there was no explanation. Mr. Ibrahim and I were soon established in a corner of the refreshment-room. He never attempted to express, by his tongue, the amazement he must have experienced in finding an English lady among the Eurasians of Vepery. He helped me to stale sandwiches and hot lemonade, and himself to a brandy-and-soda, and proceeded to discourse of German waltzes, the Madras heat, amateur theatricals, and the red dust, precisely as if I were a young "spin" whom he had met the day before. He spoke English admirably, with a scarcely perceptible accent, and whenever I looked up I found his black eyes fastened on me; they also spoke an intelligible language. Their glance expressed admiration, and my whole soul revolted against the approval of this subtle, clever, insinuating Persian.

He had travelled much, he informed me, for he was not disposed to be the least secretive respecting himself.

"I was partly educated in England—that is, I was in Edinburgh when I took out my degree as doctor."

"Then do you practise now?" I inquired carelessly.

"Oh, no," with a superior smile; "I spend my time far more profitably, though I am always interested in chemistry and poisons. May I ask what interests Miss Ferrars?"

"I really cannot answer you," I replied; "it used to be music." Now, frankly, my interests were claimed by the cook's account and the boarders'-book; so I adopted Lord Chesterfield's advice, which is, "Do not tell everything, but never lie."

"Possibly you are interested in some one—it would be more natural at your age," he suggested, leaning towards me with a confidential air, and staring in a manner that made my heart hot within me, whilst the perfume of sandal-wood seemed to permeate the atmosphere.

"No," I returned sharply, and I made a movement to rise; but we were encompassed on all sides by a dense crowd talking at the top of their voices, and were really as much apart from them as if we had occupied one of the "kala juggas" in the verandah.

This being the case, my companion had suddenly abandoned his commonplace discourse of London and Paris, of parks and operas, and had suddenly diverted the conversation into a personal channel. He now placed both arms squarely on the table, and said, looking across at me with his piercing, crafty eyes—

"I will tell you one thing: I must confess that I was much surprised to find an English lady among this company, accomplished—for she plays difficult German waltzes to perfection,—cultured, beautiful—that is to be seen,—well-bred, and of good blood, different from all these Crannies," with a scornful jerk of his hand, "yet living in a low, half-caste boarding-house aloof from all her own class. *What* is the key to the enigma?" suddenly dropping his voice till it was a mere caressing murmur.

I was instantly sensible of a glow beginning from my toes, and creeping like a hot wave to the crown of my head.

"If you have been surprised," I answered after a moment's silence, "my amazement far exceeds yours."

"And how?" he whispered seductively, whilst his eyes devoured me.

"That a man—I cannot say gentleman—an utter stranger, should dare to question me about my private concerns."

He drew back hastily, almost as if I had struck him, and I could see that he was again surprised. As I spoke, I had risen to my full height; I was taller than he was. I felt the dominant race surging through my veins; the looks, the insinuations, the attitude of this sleek, dark Eastern roused me and carried me beyond my surroundings.

"I wish to return to the other room," I continued. "Be good enough to leave me."

As this, of course, would have advertised our quarrel, he at once preceded me, making way for me to pass with the deference usually accorded to a crowned head; and in a few moments I was again in the empty ballroom. As long as I was absent there could be but little dancing. Some one had thumped out part of the Grasshopper's Polka, another had attempted the first bars of "Mia Cara" and then ignominously broken down.

"I see," said Ibrahim, when we came to a standstill, "that I have deeply offended—unhappily offended. I mistook you for——"

I looked at him steadily, and the end of the sentence died away under his moustache.

"I only desired to befriend you. Pardon me," and he bowed with a humility that bordered on exaggeration; but I merely stood and received his apology in haughty silence—my eyes never quailed before his,—and then I moved over to the piano and at once began to play.

The room was full in a moment, the dust returned in volumes, and the stamping was resumed. I noticed that Ibrahim stood against the opposite wall, talking eagerly to Lola—the most loquacious of all our girls—and watching

me, or endeavouring to watch me, for he could only see part of my head and profile. At two o'clock I arose finally, with the comfortable conviction that I had done my share towards promoting the success of the "little hop;" and after anxious and protracted searchings in verandahs, corners, and compound, I assembled my flock. The stout, dark papa had come up and implored me to "take refreshment;" several swains, including the great Frederick, had bidden me to the dance. But I remained inflexible—I wished to return home.

At last we were all once more packed into the gharry, which was besieged by the admirers of Gwendoline, Lola, and Josephine, and, above all, of that queen of beauty, Señorita Eulalie. An immense crowd gathered on the steps to speed us, and it was abundantly plain that I was carrying off the belle of the ball, and that "our lot had cut out all the rest." Among the crowd I noticed Ibrahim standing apart—slender, erect, faultlessly dressed, curiously different to the mob of partners. He waved his hand to me expressively as we drove away.

What a gabble in that gharry! a party of magpies and parrots was as nothing in comparison to these four girls all talking at once in the shrillest of "chi chi."

"Oh, Pamela, you did look grand!" said Eulalie; "and your music got into my toes and ears. I never enjoyed myself so much."

"Nor I," cried Lola. "I danced everything, and every one was asking where you came from, Pamela; and when I said 'Rosario's,' they thought I was only joking."

"Melville said he saw you with us in church," resumed Eulalie, "but you wore such a veil, he thought you might be the pig-faced lady."

"They were all so awed," announced Gwendoline, "they did not venture to ask you to dance; they saw you were not one of us, and had not the cheek. It's your hair that is so wonderful, and not dyed one bit. I told them, on my sacred honour, that I had often seen you washing it, and it came far below your waist like a cloak of gold."

"Thank you, Gwendoline; that was very noble of you."

"As for Mr. Ibrahim," screamed Lola, "you have cut out Eulalie. He scarcely danced at all, and kept looking at you; and he asked me such loads of questions: when you came, where you came from, had you gentleman-friends in Madras? He is enormously rich, Fernandez says, and goes to London and Amsterdam."

"As far as I am concerned, he may go to Jericho," said Eulalie; "I don't like him. Oh, and I am so sleepy! and yet I don't want to sleep, for I am so happy."

Gwendoline, who was sitting on my knee, turned on her sharply.

"Oh, yes, *I* saw you. I saw how you danced with Melville, and you were out in the compound for ages. Eulalie, I believe he—kissed you!"

Eulalie burst into an hysterical laugh, and said, "You are a silly goose! I believe I've worn the soles off my shoes, and there is a spot of coffee on my frock. I believe I see the dawn;" and she pointed to a faint light glimmering beyond the toddy palms.

"I believe I shall not get up until late to-day."

Here we arrived, and routed up the drowsy chokedar; and Eulalie fled away to her own room, though she did not wish to sleep, she was so happy.

I was not happy, yet I slept.

CHAPTER XXIV

A BORROWED UMBRELLA

It may appear extraordinary that I had so quickly, and almost without a struggle, completely sunk into another sphere, precisely as if I had been swallowed up in a morass. I was, however, but resting on my oars; my ambition was slumbering, not dead. I was by no means wedded to my present lot—I had other aspirations; but what can a penniless and friendless young woman do in India? She is like a forlorn creature in captivity, and may break her heart, and beat her hands in vain against the stone walls of circumstance if she has no money and is too proud to ask for relief. My aunt was dead—had died rather suddenly—so Linda informed me in a curt, formal note, which only reached me after being out to Lohara, then back to Mr. Evans in England, and once more to the East, accompanied by a kind letter from him, also enclosing a most excellent reference. My aunt had forgiven me, Linda had assured me, but she also made it plain that I was not to presume on this indulgence, as she signed herself mine faithfully, L. Beverly. So that door was shut to me for ever, and I had closed the Tregar portal with my own hands.

I believe that if Aunt Lucy had been left to herself she would have befriended me, and perhaps welcomed me home; but she had to study Linda's views and Emma's prejudices. Her mortification was but natural, that the only wedding among her girls had never come off, and had, moreover, given rise to no end of "talk,"—and "talk" respecting one of their family was bitterer than death to a Beverly. There had been talk about my mother, now there followed "talk" of me. I had received another letter from Mr. Evans urging me to leave Rosario's at once—he had a horror of Eurasians; but if I did abandon my kind Mistress Rosario, who owed me three months' pay, one hundred rupees would not carry me very far. Mr. Evans would have lent me money, but I knew the condition of his finances far too well to avail myself of his generosity.

I had been six months in Vepery, and those six months had not been uneventful. Many things had happened, though not to me. Auntie Gam was dead—had died peacefully in her sleep, poor old creature!—and had been buried with much pomp and circumstance. Gwendoline, whose term at Doveton College had nearly expired, was engaged to a nice young man in Barry's house and a lieutenant in the Volunteers. Fitz Alan was desperately in love with a warrant officer's daughter; and, as his suit was not prospering, was glum, irritable, and as cross as any bear. Lola, as we all expected, had taken high honours. John had returned, as we also expected, empty-handed and depressed; and Eulalie was still divided among her host of worshippers. For a considerable time Ibrahim had been paying his addresses to her, and was now a constant visitor at number sixteen. At first he came to dinner merely as the guest of Frederick (for he patronized that great

man who patronized us all), and truly splendid were the preparations we made in his honour. Two lamps in the dining-room, flowers, sweets from Darainsaumy's, claret, and tinned salmon. We borrowed from our neighbours right and left: Mrs. Cardozo's glass dishes and spoons, Mrs. Josephs' tablecloth and Harvey sauce, not to speak of Mrs. Fernandez' silver (?) salver.

Borrowing is an everyday matter in Blacktown; borrowing or lending the usual condition of life. We lent or borrowed from a piano to a pie-dish, from a reel of cotton to a ball-gown. I lent also. How could I resist the atmosphere of mutual generosity, or refuse in the face of so much genial good nature? I lent clothes; but, paradoxical as it sounds, I drew the line strictly at our own circle. Gwendoline attributed her conquests to my feather boa and silk-lined skirt; Eulalie wore my favourite blouse; and my petticoats and stockings were regarded as common property. I must acknowledge that, had I required similar accommodation, it would have been bestowed ungrudgingly; but I never could carry off another person's wardrobe with an airy grace. Now, as Eulalie warmly assured me, she always felt most self-satisfied and looked her best in strange garments. She certainly looked remarkably handsome in my best hat!—but then, Eulalie looked well in everything. She wore my blue evening gown with scarlet geraniums the night Ibrahim dined—indeed, we all endeavoured to put our best foot foremost on that supreme occasion. Even Mrs. Rosario was so honoured and uplifted, that she attired herself in a shiny green satin—wearing a cape to conceal the enormous hiatus in the bodice. She put a double amount of powder on her face, had her hair dressed by a borrowed ayah, and really, I could, with a mental

effort, have imagined that once upon a time she had been fair to see, and that the tradition in Vepery was no myth. The smile of consummated bliss was on her lips. Gratified ambition and complete satisfaction are a splendid cosmetic. The Chamberses were totally extinguished; never had it been their lot, never would it be their good fortune, to receive under their cat-haunted roof one in whose veins ran "the royal blood of Persia."

Now that the novelty and *éclat* of Mr. Ibrahim's company had bred—well, I will not say contempt—but laziness, we could not long pretend to live up to the pitch of that dinner. The semi-royal guest saw us as we were—he saw them as they were, for *I* carefully avoided him. He saw Mrs. Rosario in the old wrapper which she preferred to dignify as a tea-gown; he saw Gwendoline and Lola with their hair in curling-pins; and "Mardie girl" dirty and down-at-heel. All the same his visits occurred with unabated regularity; he took Eulalie out in the dashing stanhope. She hated his company, so she loudly assured us, but went solely with the virtuous intention of "annoying those Chamberses and Cardozoses," for no smart private carriage ever swept up to their verandahs. Yes, she declared, it nearly killed her rivals to behold her seated up in such state; but she bowed to them very kindly from under my white parasol. There were tea-parties on the brown, burnt-up compound sprinkled with stones; and these Mr. Ibrahim attended faithfully, bringing flowers, books, sweets, jewels, which he laid at Eulalie's feet. But, all the time, I had a secret and hideous instinct that Ibrahim the financier really came to see *me*. It was at me he looked, to me he spoke on rare opportunities. He approached me slowly, softly, stealthily, in the guise of

"Eulalie's beau." He was so subtle, that no one guessed his secret but Jocasta, who guessed everything—Jocasta, who sat and stared and watched, then nudged me sharply and winked wickedly.

"It is you he is coming after," she imparted to me one day. "He is mad about you; they say so in the bazaar, and it is the talk of Popham's Broadway and all Vepery and Chepawk!"

"Jocasta!" I retorted angrily, "how can you listen to what the servants say? If you were my sister I declare I should have you whipped."

"Whipped! Ha! ha! I'm nearly fifteen. I'd like to see any one touch me, though they all say that Colonel Bilter in the Luz beats his wife."

* * * * * *

It was the month of August. Government, the Madras ladies, and all the men who could obtain leave were up on the Neilgherries, whilst we poor wretches were gasping on the dusty plains. It is true there was an evening breeze from the sea, and the sunsets were indescribably magnificent—the sunsets in Southern India are unrivalled—and from these scanty materials I drew an infinitesimal amount of satisfaction. Suddenly it dawned upon Frederick Augustus that he would give a picnic—and a moonlight picnic,—to one of the old bungalows on the hill at Palaveram; and naturally this idea was received with general acclamation.

As the moon admitted of no delay, it was to take place at once. I think we were a party of fifty, though I had done my best to struggle out of it; but Mrs. Rosario was firm—go I must, because I had so little pleasure. Truly it was not my idea of pleasure, to rumble out in the

crowded train to Palaveram, on a sweltering afternoon, and in uncongenial company.

Some lucky people drove down, down that beautiful shady road lined with banyan trees, between the old cantonment and St. Thomas's Mount. Once Palaveram had been a great military station, and garrisoned by John Company young recruits, who had landed at Madras, and were there drilled, taught discipline and Hindustani. Their quarters, barracks, bungalows—many in ruins—lined the long, grass-edged roads overshadowed with great banyan trees. There were two odd, conical mounts, rising one thousand feet from the plains like pyramids; on the summit of each had been erected a large bungalow, to which, in hot weather, one or two residents had betaken themselves, under the fond delusion that they were on the hills. They were certainly one thousand feet above the plain, one thousand feet above their bazaar, post, and water-supply. By degrees, as the price of labour increased, these bungalows were abandoned just as they stood. A curious and inexplicable fact, in Southern India, is the number of deserted furnished bungalows. These, which were full of quaint black wood furniture, cane sofas, outlandish pictures, Arjaund lamps, and old-fashioned crockery, were left to their own devices and a chokedar, who slept in the verandah by night, and smoked by day. They were occasionally used for picnics; and Frederick, who had been born at Palaveram, had an immense respect for the ancient habitations, and could actually recall a year when one of them was let! The walk to the foot of our particular hill was really most interesting. We clambered about among palms, guava trees, and burnt-grass slopes, till at last we came upon an ancient Hindoo temple close to the base, or

rather in a dip between the hills. It was shaded by an immense banyan, and exhibited in the centre of the inner court a hideous stone figure on a peculiarly shaped horse, or it might be a cow. The whole place, though a very solid structure, had a ruined, neglected appearance. As I lingered and gazed around, I was startled by a voice beside me, which said—

"This is a temple to Kali; yonder is the sacrificial stone—see how worn it is. Four hundred years ago it was in daily, ay, hourly use."

The voice and explanation belonged to my *bête noir*, who had driven Eulalie to the picnic. How had he so promptly discovered my whereabouts? I looked back, and descried, at a respectful distance, Jocasta the spy. It was physically impossible for her to blush, nor could she even look uneasy. Well, perhaps I was wronging the girl. Mr. Ibrahim's appearance might have been purely accidental. Accidental or otherwise, now he had found me it was manifest that he intended to keep me; it was difficult to shake him off. He attended me closely as I climbed up the rocky hill by a rarely trodden path, among boulders and cactus bushes. Here and there I would have halted to watch a curious lizard basking on a stone, a couple of little jackals at play, to gaze on the splendid crimson sun, sinking into a purple bed, amid flames that illuminated the whole flat country, the palm tops, the banyans, and the white buildings on St. Thomas's Mount; but, as Mr. Ibrahim was my escort, I hurried forward at a breakneck pace in order to find safety in the multitude. His conversation was deferential and commonplace: the heat, the monsoon, the moon, formed the subject of his remarks, to which I replied in breathless monosyllables.

The programme arranged for our entertainment was as follows: a cold supper in the bungalow, then strolling *ad libitum* in the silver moonlight, singing and games: once more indoors, and final refreshments. Fortunately for me, there was no piano. The supper went off with great merriment and chattering, and every one seemed in the best of spirits in that dim, musty dining-room, a speaking reminder of former days, with its ancient chairs and pictures, dingy chintzes, and solid mahogany sideboard; but I am sure no one cast a thought to old times but myself. Frederick Augustus had taken me under his wing, to my surprise; these were different times to those when he hinted at the "Friend in Need Society." I was now a flattered guest, placed on his right hand. Why had I been selected for this honour? I could not even hazard a conjecture. Had whispers in the bazaar reached his ears? or, another unpleasant possibility, had Ibrahim given him a hint? In the moonlight we sat out on a sort of terrace, and some played games, some flirted, many rambled down the hill. I remained sedately between two matrons, entrenched against Ibrahim, who hovered around, but, finding no opening for storming the position, or joining in conversation on the price of ghee and charcoal and the enormities of the Madras cooks, finally withdrew in discomfiture.

The moon was brilliant, but the air was somewhat chill; it was long after sunset, and the bugles at the Mount had sounded the last post, a warning to us that it was time to be getting under way.

The two matrons, Mrs. Josephs and Cardozo, collected their parties, and we had retreated indoors. The dining-room was crowded, people stood round the table drinking iced lemonade, when Eulalie and Mr. Ibrahim

appeared, the very last arrivals. "They had been down the hill," she gaily announced, "sitting among the rocks in such an awfully romantic spot." I was pleased to hear it; but young Melville's smiling expression suddenly changed to deepest gloom. Eulalie, who carried the tail of her flowing cotton dress over her arm, sat down, and held out her hand for a glass of iced water; as she did so she let fall her skirt, and Mrs. Josephs gave an ear-splitting yell, for there, carefully coiled up in Eulalie's train, was a large cobra! She had probably been sitting close to his hole, the heat of her body had allured him to make a nest in her gown, and she had carried him safely into the bungalow. The shock of being thus rudely flung to the ground, roused the reptile effectually. In a second he had reared himself and erected his horrible hood, prepared to strike. He stood up two feet above the floor, a beautiful but terrible object, exactly between Eulalie and Mr. Ibrahim, whilst close around were a densely-packed crowd pinned between the wall and the dinner-table. No one dared move, yet death was in our midst. We were chiefly women in the snake's vicinity, all but Ibrahim, and *he* truly was no hero. His face became of an awful slate colour, his lips were drawn back from his gleaming teeth, the water he was carrying slopped out of the tumbler thanks to his trembling hand. What a scene ensued!—some shrieked, some were simply rigid, paralyzed with fear, one girl fainted—even now I can see fat Mistress Cardozo scrambling up on the sideboard—a feat that on an ordinary occasion would have been physically impossible. There was not a second, no, nor half a second, to lose ere the fatal blow fell on some one. I looked round for a weapon—stick, parasol. Behind me on the table lay Frederick's best umbrella. I

snatched it up and hit the creature over the head with all my strength. If I missed, if I merely dealt an ineffectual blow, and the cobra was not stunned, I was aware that I would pay for my failure with my life. It was the cobra or me. But, armed with the force of frenzy, I had struck in a vulnerable spot, the snake's back was broken, and it suddenly subsided into furious hissings, and hideous and impotent writhings. At least, it could no longer pursue or strike. Ibrahim regained his former colour, and, with the assistance of young Melville and a great appearance of reckless valour, now put an end to the cobra. Then Babel broke loose!—Eulalie flung herself into my arms, and immediately went off in hysterics. What "oh mys!" and "awfullees" resounded, and what a sudden outburst of snake stories! Meanwhile Mistress Cardozo was assisted from the sideboard, the dead snake was carried out on a stick, having measured a good honest four feet. I believe that more than half the people were under the impression that Ibrahim had killed the reptile, especially as he claimed the skin in order to have it stuffed; but, at any rate, Frederick was under no delusion, and well aware of the true state of the case, when he found that I had smashed his best silk "Europe" umbrella.

CHAPTER XXV

AN OFFER AND A THREAT

WHEN the labours of the afternoon were over, and everything had been conscientiously ordered and given out, it was my custom to take my walk abroad, up and down the old grass road at the back of the abandoned infantry lines. A few dusty cactus bushes and some date palms fenced it off from general traffic, and the only other frequenters of this spot were two goats and a dhoby's donkey. Here I often paced to and fro for an hour, vainly endeavouring to mature some plan. Was I becoming lethargic, impassive, and content, like some of my neighbours? Had the enervating climate dispelled all my brains and energy? I was past twenty-one; I was accomplished; I was said to be good-looking; I was of gentle birth, and, I hoped, of good disposition; and yet I was stuck fast—possibly for life—as the servant of an Indian boarding-house. Well, I must be patient, and wait till I could scrape together three hundred rupees, and then I might happen to get a passage in some cargo tramp. After all, I was young, I had excellent health, I had kind faces around me, I was working for my bread. I might be in a far worse plight—I might be the wife of Watty! Still, when I caught

glimpses of other English girls riding, driving, boating, shopping, so well dressed, so sheltered, so light-hearted, I heaved more than one envious sigh, as I thought how different was their lot to mine. It was their lot to enjoy all manner of delights which make youth so sunny a season, it was mine to go home and dole out the oil and curry stuff, the eggs and the coffee; to see that the lamps were trimmed, the rooms swept, the water filtered; to sympathize with Mrs. Rosario over the death of a calf; and to mourn with Lola over the defection of a lover. Surely my feelings and habits, with nothing to foster them and maintain their vitality, would wither and die, and I would become, like the others, a girl who only cared for scent and sweets, for flaunting frocks and fervid flirtations.

I had not seen Mr. Ibrahim since the snake incident, for which he had adroitly crowned himself with laurels; but he and I knew the truth, and that perhaps was the reason why he shunned me, and I heard with a joy that was almost painful that he had left Madras for important business in Delhi. Truly the snake had not appeared in vain, if it rid me for ever of the scion of Persian royalty, Mr. Nazar Ibrahim. So I hoped; but my hopes were rudely shattered. One day Jocasta sidled up to me and butted me violently with her head—her peculiar idea of a caress.

"Well, what do you want now?" I asked. "I have no jaggerie" (lumps of dark soft sugar).

"I don't want jaggerie," she retorted; "but look at this;" and she slowly opened her hand and disclosed a note. It was addressed in writing as clear as copperplate, to "Miss Ferrars."

"For me?" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"For you," she repeated, "from Mr. Ibrahim. He is back again; he has been to Delhi. He asked me to slip it into your hand when no one was looking."

"Jocasta," I said, with great anger, "how can you do these things? Why are you so sly?"

"Because I like it," was the unabashed reply.

"Take your note back to Mr. Ibrahim; I will not receive it."

"What! Why not? I give lots to Eulalie and Josephine. Mr. Ibrahim has promised me a present, a box of candied fruit, and money."

"And I can promise you a box on your ear if you ever try to bring me notes again. The postman can manage his own business."

"May I tell Mr. Ibrahim that?" she asked sharply.

"No; tell him I will not receive his letters."

"But he is so rich, and so crazy about you. He will give you splendid things from Orrs and Oakes' if you are nice to him—and you need not marry him in the end," urged this dear simple child.

"Go away, Jocasta," I said, giving her a push. "No wonder you are called Jocasta the sneak."

"Well, you are called Pamela the Proud. Mr. Ibrahim calls you Pamela the Princess, but I call you Pamela the Pig;" and Ibrahim's emissary sprang away in a rage with her plaits flying behind her, but she never brought me another note.

One evening I was strolling up and down my beat alone, without any covering on my head, and my hands clasped loosely behind me. I was building castles as usual. Mrs. Rosario had sold three fine calves, and paid me my salary. I had now one hundred rupees in my writing-case, and I

began at last to see land. As I turned at the end of my private track, I found to my horror that Ibrahim was beside me, obsequious, well groomed, sleek, and self-possessed.

"So this is your haunt!" he said, taking off his hat. "I have often wondered where you hide yourself. Why do you always run away when you see me, Miss Ferrars?"

"I do not," I replied, with the mental reservation that I fled, when I heard he was coming.

"Oh, fie! I thought English ladies never told fibs. You do not like me; you cannot bear me. I see it in your eyes; and this is very unlucky, for I like you—oh, so much, and you know that, don't you?"

"No."

"What! yet another fib! I want you to like me. I want to be your friend—to serve you if I can."

"Why should you serve *me*?" I inquired haughtily.

"Because——"—a long pause. "Well, you interest me. You are not merely beautiful. You have a strong character, and you are good."

I averted my face in angry silence, for I hated his presence. We were now pacing the road together.

"Do you know that when I saw you that night at the dance, I made a solemn vow to myself, a resolution that will change the whole conduct of my life." His eyes were almost on a level with mine, and as he looked at me, he said, "Can you guess? have you no curiosity?"

"None respecting your plans."

"Well, then, I will be generous, and tell you. I made up my mind to marry you."

"To—marry—me—!" I repeated slowly.

"Yes; you are the type of woman I admire. Your hair alone is glorious; your air, your white throat——"

"That will do," I broke in passionately. "I am not at auction."

"No, though you are like an old picture! Among all that crowd, and those really handsome girls, you looked different; you looked a queen. I was staggered to hear you were Rosario's drudge. Of course I believed you had a screw loose, and I made a mistake. Oh, yes; I put my foot in it, as you say, and you frightened me." Here he gave a little laugh. "I have made inquiries; there is no slur, no secret, and no lover. It is inconceivable. I heard that you are independent, hard-working, beloved, fallen from your high estate—a pearl among swine."

So this was his summing up of good-natured Mistress Rosario and bewitching Eulalie. I was about to speak.

"A moment"—extending his thin brown hand; "hear me out patiently. I have waited long for this chance. I have weighed my words. It is not alone your beauty, your white satin skin, your hair like beaten copper, that attracts me. It is the grandeur of your character, your heroic self-suppression." His talk was a mixture of fine language and slang. "When I was up north, I heard your story; bazaar tales carry far. You had chucked a beastly bounder, broken with your friends, and fallen back on your own resources. Now, these are not great"—again he signed to me to suffer him speak. "You are young, clever, well bred, brave. Here you waste beauty, youth, life; allow me to take you from all this"—pointing a contemptuous finger towards the back of Rosario's—"and to make you my wife."

"Thank you for your good opinion of me," I answered

stiffly, when he had ceased speaking, and stood still. "But I must decline your offer."

"Oh, then you are foolish!" he replied, with perfect self-command. "And it will come off all the same. I have a will of iron. I have also great luck."

"I have also a will," I retorted, "though I cannot boast of great luck. My mind is made up. I do not change; I mean what I say."

"So you suppose. Now let this be the one exception that proves the rule. Listen. I offer you wealth, jewels, liberty, England. I will return there, and live part of the year in London, to please you. I am, though you denied it, a gentleman, and of good race. I will give you your heart's desire as far as in me lies. I will marry you according to your religion, and you shall have a carriage."

"Please say no more," I interposed, now roused to a white heat. "For nothing you can urge will alter my—mind," and by a strenuous effort of will I looked straight into his hateful eyes.

"Well, at least accord me your acquaintance, and allow me to assist you to a better post," he persisted.

"My acquaintance you have already made, and I have no wish to leave Mrs. Rosario at present."

"Then your aspirations are low indeed."

"At present—yes."

"Now, I am enormously ambitious."

"So I perceive."

"You might have spared me that gibe, you haughty English girl; and I may have my heel on your neck yet."

"You may," I replied contemptuously, "when I am dead."

"I know plenty of girls in England," he boasted.

"They were not all like you. Many a time I kissed them, and they kissed me, behind parlour doors. Oh, they made a lot of me, I can tell you. I don't pretend to be a saint, or better than I am."

"No, for it would be useless."

"Ah, ha! you have a sharp tongue. I like it. Women are generally too sweet; there is that Eulalie——"

"She is my friend," I interposed, "and you have given her every reason to suppose that she is yours."

"Bah! she was only a blind. Do you suppose that a man of my race would think seriously of an empty-headed Eurasian? When she is thirty she will weigh maunds and maunds. No, no; Eulalie was merely a ladder to reach *you*."

"You will never reach me, Mr. Ibrahim."

"You think you are a star, and dwell apart! You see, I know some of your poetry. Well, I will leave you to your belief, but I swear that I will reach you yet."

"Now that we are at the back entrance," I said—it was merely a hole in the wall—"I can dispense with your escort. I shall be glad if you will leave me;" and I bowed, and took my departure with as much dignity as the condition of my exit permitted.

If Ibrahim were to harry me, dog me, persecute me, what should I do? where could I go? where find an outlet of escape? And the worst of it was, that he would have an ardent aider and abettor in Mrs. Rosario. She delighted in match-making, and would never allow me, if she could help it, to refuse a man who stood near the throne of Persia, and could load me with dignities and diamonds.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. ROSARIO'S FÊTE

NEXT to Christmas, the greatest yearly festival at 16 Crundall's Road was Mrs. Rosario's birthday. It occurred on the 5th of October, and was kept with extraordinary enthusiasm. The good lady was overwhelmed with flowers, visits, and offerings—these latter of no particular value beyond their expression of hearty affection. I really believe my employer was the most popular woman in Vepery; even her deadliest rival, Mrs. Chambers, sent a basket of custard apples with a chit—the basket to be returned. There was to be an evening party, to which Mistress Rosario's own particular cronies, or "chums," as she called them, were duly bidden. They were to enjoy a regular orgie of cards, coffee, and sweeties; but the grandest feature, the crowning glory of the day, was a full-dress state drive to the band;—yes, in an old battered landau, drawn by a pair of gaunt white walers. I could not evade this ceremony without hurting Mrs. Rosario's feelings, for this expedition was her special treat. Behold her, then, attired for the occasion in a thin white blouse, a Reckitt's-blue cashmere skirt, a coral necklace, and a picture hat; a pair of yellow cotton gloves, and a

pink ditto sunshade, completed her toilet. Eulalie, Josephine, Gwendoline, and Jocasta wore their gayest raiment—and mine. We were a party of six besides the driver, and I was invited to take the seat of honour, on Mrs. Rosario's right hand, the three girls sat opposite, and Jocasta on the box. We drove off, with as much parade as Mrs. Gilpin herself. "Six precious souls, and all agog to dash through thick and thin." We trundled down through the Poonamallee Road, Blacktown, through the resounding tunnel-like St. George's Gate, into the old fort, past barracks, arsenal, officers' quarters, church, out under another gateway to the sea-front, where, at the band-stand, opposite the Chepawk Palace, all fashionable and unfashionable Madras were sitting in carriages, or promenading. The excellent band of the Ploughboys was playing a selection of the latest popular music. I remember the particular piece was "The Geisha," as our driver, goaded by Jocasta, forced his way into a prominent place among all the smartest equipages in the front row. Government had returned from Ootacamund, and was now at Guindy; aides-de-camp and other celebrities were pointed out to us by Jocasta from her perch—that *enfant terrible* was apparently acquainted with every one's appearance and "skeleton." Everything is known in the Indian bazaar; the affairs of their rulers afford a perennial interest to a certain class of natives, and nothing that we do is too bad, too shameless, too extraordinary not to be believed. Chinna Ayah was thoroughly posted up in "Gup," and Jocasta—who spoke Tamil like any "grass cut"—gossiped with her for hours.

I had been watching the procession passing to and fro with rather languid interest. There was not one European

among the crowd whose face was known to me. Smart women in summery gowns, pretty girls with the English roses in their cheeks, well-set-up young men in creaseless suits, portly elders with the cares of law, treasure, and state weighing on their shoulders, officers in undress uniform, painted Eurasians, pale missionary ladies, bronzed and weather-beaten sailors, all flocked to and fro. I noticed a striking woman, in flowing white dress, with the profile of a Roman empress, crowned by a Parisian toque. Her carriage was imperial, her toilet perfect, her voice delicious—pure, clear-cut English. I could hear it quite distinctly, as she passed within a yard of me, walking with a man in grey. I glanced at him casually; he was Mr. Thorold!—Mr. Thorold, so deeply interested in his companion that he did not recognize me, and I sank back in my corner behind the wreck of my once white parasol, a prey to an extraordinary variety of emotions.

How my heart thumped! for, in spite of some faint resistance within me, my whole inner being was shaken by the force of the moment. I had caught a glimpse of that lost illusion, the expressive face, which had lured me to the East, and was the true cause of all my misfortunes. Now I must only pray that he would not discover me in my fallen estate. I watched furtively for a long time, but that particular couple never reappeared among the flowing tide of passers-by. Our girls had descended to promenade with various friends; a crony came and gossiped with Mrs. Rosario about her son's clerkship, and the awful price of potatoes. I ventured at last to put down my parasol, as the sun was slowly sinking into the sea, and stared out upon the restless surf, and beyond it to where tall-masted ships lay rocking at anchor.

As I withdrew my eyes from sea to land, I again beheld Mr. Thorold. He was coming back alone, and he had recognized me. He approached the carriage without a moment's hesitation, and took off his hat, as he said—

"Miss Ferrars, I am very glad to see you; this is another unexpected meeting." And he held out his hand in greeting.

"I suppose it is," I faltered in a faint voice.

"I hope you are well; I cannot say that you look very brilliant."

"Eet is all her own fault," broke in Mrs. Rosario, evidently delighted at the encounter, and that I could claim such a distinguished friend. "She will never go out, and never have fun like other girls. She will not even go to bands, or dance, or any gay doings. I have dragged her here to-day. She is like an old coolie woman, I tell her. Work, work, work—always so beezie."

"All work and no play, I see," he commented; "it does not agree with any one."

"No. Now you take her for a little walk," continued my chaperon; "eet will do her good. All my other girls are walking with their beaux. Pamella, Mrs. Cardozo will take your seat, and have a little chat; thatt is the best way to arrange,—and then we will all be happy. For me, I am too stout, and cannot promenade."

"I was about to suggest your taking a turn with me," said Mr. Thorold, without meeting my eye, as he helped me out, and, still more difficult business, assisted Mrs. Cardozo to ascend to the place of honour.

For a moment or two we walked in dead silence, and then he exclaimed—

"Well? Or is it not well?"

I shook my head expressively.

"What have you been doing for the past year? What are you doing now? May I hear?" And the intense earnestness of his gaze magnetized me into confidence and loosened my tongue.

"I suppose I had better tell you the worst at once, and get it over," I answered. "I am living in a cheap, half-caste boarding-house. I am the housekeeper; that stout old woman is my mistress. This is her birthday, and she has driven me down to the band for a treat."

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "But how on earth did you ever arrive at this situation?" And as he spoke, Mr. Thorold's tone was sharp and imperious.

"By the easy road of poverty," I replied; and then, in a few stammering sentences, helped out by his leading questions, I related to him the history of my career since we had taken leave of one another on the road to Dassi. I was so moved by the fact of speaking to one of my own colour, country, and class, that I was carried away to disclose more than I had intended. I told him of my futile attempt to find a situation; of Lady Elizabeth's offer. On one subject alone—the subject of Ibrahim and his hateful proposal—my lips were sealed. As we walked and talked, Mr. Thorold encountered many bowing, smiling acquaintances, and more than once I came face to face with the astonished Eulalie and giggling Gwendoline, whose amazement was writ large in their countenances, and in their loud laugh, and playful accosts.

"And you actually live among these people?" he said, in a shocked voice.

"Yes. Mrs. Rosario is a good, kind old soul; the boarders and her relations are not difficult to get on with.

There is no severe struggle for life, no scolding, no scenes. It is all very easy-going. I receive twenty rupees a month—and earn it."

"And what are your duties?" he asked peremptorily.

"Housekeeping, marketing; I go to the bazaar, I give out stores, I make out the boarders' bills, and look after the servants. I teach, water the garden, and trim the lamps."

"Well, I see you have carried out your threat of punishing yourself, and that you belong to the order of the Flagellants."

"I had no choice," I protested. "And you—what has cast you into the benighted presidency? I presume you are still rising?"

"I have risen with a vengeance!" he replied. "I have arrived at the dizzy summit of being dry nurse to a young rajah. He is six years of age, and will give no trouble—at present; but I have a horde of women on my hands, squabbling, spiteful, scheming women—grandmothers, mother, aunts, cousins."

"He cannot have many grandmothers," I remarked.

"No, only one, but she is a host in herself, the Rani Sundaram—a regular old tartar with two tongues. She ruled first her husband, then her son. *She* was the state—and such a state! Her methods were those of the fifteenth century—squalor, slaves, tortures, mad extravagance."

"She does not sound attractive," I said.

"No; and the British Government have deposed her. Her husband and son died at the age of thirty-five. They say there is a curse on the dynasty, and no reigning rajah ever sees thirty-six years."

"Why? what is the reason?"

"Because, so the story runs, a man unjustly was

condemned and executed with the usual horrible details, and declared that as witness to his innocence, no Rajah of Royapetta should never live longer than he had done, —and he was thirty-five. It is a remarkable fact that the last three Rajahs have died in their prime."

"Imagination must have had something to do with it," I said. "I suppose a man can fix the term of his own life, if he is brought up to it and haunted by a certain date."

"There may be something in what you say; at any rate, Fate has left another Rajah—a minor—in this woman's clutches. She is as ambitious as Napoleon, as cruel as the sea, as clever as the devil, but now the 'Raj' has stepped in and snatched her victim from her. She has had to stand by and see him handed over to *me*. You may imagine how she loves me. I am regent, ruler, and Rajah, being called by the less high-sounding title of 'political agent.'"

"And what and where are your dominions?"

"About seventy miles from here. Royapetta is the capital of a once ancient, powerful, wealthy, now played-out and decrepit state. They say that the dynasty dates from the fifth century, and that in the twelfth it was enriched by the discovery of an enormous buried treasure, long dissipated. The area of the state has dwindled; another reign similar to the last, and it will disappear in total bankruptcy. I am doing my best to pull things together, to remit taxes, to restrain expenditure, but where I economize the Rani Sundaram spends with both hands. When I put down twenty horses and sold five state elephants, she immediately ordered a gold bed and three coats of jewels for the temple gods. It was heartbreaking; but I have stopped that for ever."

"I suppose you have put a notice in the paper, 'I, Maxwell Thorold, Political Agent of Royapetta, will not be responsible for the orders and debts of the Rani Sundaram'?"

"Not quite," he responded; "but I have other and equally effectual means. And now let me change the subject, and talk of *your* affairs."

"Unfortunately, I have no affairs to talk about."

"You are not bound to Madame Rosario, are you? And have you any plans?"

"No, only to go home some day."

"Ah, we all plan that! Now, will you do me a kindness? I won't call it a favour, or you will refuse it as usual."

"I'm afraid it is not in my power to bestow a favour, or even a kindness; but I will do what I can with pleasure."

"Then it is just this. I am looking out for an English governess for the little Rajah and his two small sisters. It is rather a difficult business. I know no more of governesses than I do of ball dresses"—and he laughed. "It seems a Nemesis for not being a ladies' man, that I should have a whole palace full of women, including two Ranies, thrust on me, to rule, manage, and keep out of debt. Well, now, look here, I want you to be the governess."

"Me, Mr. Thorold?" and I came to a full stop.

"Yes; I am sure you are fitted for the post—young, well educated, well born, and highly respectable, with clearly defined opinions on right and wrong."

"It sounds as though you were dictating a servant's chit!" I exclaimed rather hysterically.

"I have told you that the Rani Sundaram will not

be an agreeable acquaintance; but the boy's mother, the Rani Gindia, is a different stamp—soft, amiable, and gentle. She speaks English, too. You shall have your own apartments, your own servants, your own carriage, and four hundred a year."

"Four hundred rupees, I presume?"

"No, pounds—solid English sovereigns. Will you be tempted?"

"It sounds magnificent," I said at last.

"By no means. You will have a life of confinement; you will be in a strange atmosphere, a Hindoo zenana, among a number of idle, crafty, gossiping, plotting women. These children are certain to be spoiled—a handful. You will rarely see another white face but mine. You will have to bind yourself down for at least two years. You will have to put up with some disagreeables; no, it is not all jam. The question is, will you accept?"

"May I think it over," I asked, "for one day? As far as I can judge, the favour, the kindness, is from you. I spring from a cheap boarding-house, a tumble-down bungalow in Vepery, full of toads, spiders, and white ants, to a palace; from twenty rupees a month to four hundred pounds a year. Where is the kindness to you? for I cannot discern it."

"You will be my helpmate," he replied, "my coadjutor, within the palace walls, and where I may not enter you will use your influence for my aims and for good. I know I can trust you. It is a difficult post, but you are filling a less honourable one with credit. You can accommodate yourself to circumstances; you can rise to a crisis, should one occur—and *act*. I have not forgotten Watty, and I remember the plague camp. You will have the

moulding of the little Rajah, a splendid opportunity for good. Half of what you teach will be instantly undone; still, a few grains of honour, truth, and self-respect must remain in his mind."

"I should like to teach him—to try," I faltered. "It is a great honour, and a great responsibility."

"As for me, I shall be outside in the city, living in the so-called Residency. I will keep an eye on you, and see that you are treated with proper attention and consideration. I will arrange that you have liberty, and that you are supplied with a piano, papers, and books."

"These are indeed a bribe. I have not seen a new book for months, and I am far behind the world's history."

"Oh, you can easily make up for all that. What you have to do now is to make up your mind. Try it," he urged persuasively, "for at least *one* year. I might manage that; or if I mention an alternative, will you promise not to cut me dead?"

"I promise."

"Allow me to advance the money for your passage home. If you like, I will offer it to you as a loan, and to be repaid with interest. I will offer it on my bended knees; I know your pride."

"Every one has their pride," I retorted.

"And there is nothing which costs one so much. Miss Ferrars, when I look into your white face, I can see that pride has nearly cost you your life."

"You are completely mistaken," I answered quickly. "My appearance is a fraud. Every one is like this who has to stay on the plains. I am quite aware that I look as if I had been boiled. It is a degree better than looking as if I were roasted."

"Well, have you decided between the palace or the passage? You shall not remain at Mrs. Rosario's, much as you like her."

"It will be the palace," I replied, "though I doubt if I am competent; but I can speak Telagu and Hindi. I have one good recommendation, and that is all. If I really am suitable, I accept your offer gratefully; only——"

"Only what?" he inquired.

"I do not know what Mrs. Rosario will say. She will not find it easy to get another—I mean it will be troublesome to replace me."

"No; I do not think, in her most sanguine moments, she can expect to find an English lady prepared to trim lamps, and housekeep, garden, and teach, for twenty rupees a month. There is one more item to be arranged. I have a friend in the fort—my old schoolfellow, Major Dalrymple, and his wife. She is a charming woman; you must know her." He evidently alluded to the Roman empress. "She will ask you to stay with her, and I hope you will accept. It is essential that you should join the court of Royapetta from the house of an English lady."

"A half-caste boarding-house would never do," I said, with a smile.

"No; you know how natives despise and hate Eurasians, and the saying that 'God made the white man, and He made the black man; but the devil made the half-caste.'"

"Yes; but I don't agree with it. It is as false as many other sayings. Perhaps Mrs. Dalrymple will not wish to know me."

"She will; she does," he rejoined eagerly.

"What do you mean? She is ignorant of my very existence."

"No; she has heard of you. I saw you just now—you did not suppose that I would not see you anywhere. Before I walked back to the fort gates with her, I had marked down Mrs. Rosario's pink parasol. I did not venture to stop, and I could not leave Mrs. Dalrymple to wander back alone, and I returned post-haste to seek you, though I should have found you anywhere, once I knew you were in Madras. I have enlisted Mrs. Dalrymple's sympathies. She is most anxious to make your acquaintance, and will call on you without delay."

"There!" I interrupted, "I see Mrs. Rosario standing up and beckoning madly. I must join her at once."

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. ROSARIO CANNOT SAY "NO"

YES, there was Mrs. Rosario standing erect in the landau, flourishing her pink parasol with prodigious vigour, as we approached. The rest of the party, already seated, were, figuratively, all eyes.

"Oh, my Pamella, whatt a time you have been!" she screamed, "and you know Mrs. Pereira and Mistress Gonzales will be waiting, and you have the keys; but"—sitting as she spoke, and beaming with effulgence—"it is not often thatt you have a young man, and I forgive you."

Mr. Thorold raised his hat and said, "Will you allow me to have the honour of calling to-morrow?"

"Oh, yess, certainly; I shall be awfullee glad. Miss Ferrars has no gentleman visitors. I think it is time the ice was broken. But we cannot take you in," she added, with a happy laugh, "we are *so* full."

"Thank you; but I am not staying in Madras for any time."

"Oh my! whatt a peety!" she ejaculated, and her face fell.

Mr. Thorold made no reply. He was looking at Eulalie,

and for the moment, I believe, was lost in the wonder of her eyes; and also, perhaps, imbued with the necessity of saying something, and the perplexity of having nothing to say. However, Mrs. Rosario was never at a loss for words, and I think that, as she gabbled on, she was delighted to exhibit to her neighbours the spectacle of a distinguished-looking gentleman standing at the wheels of her chariot.

"Ah, I suppose you are one of the busy officials, come down about the salt tax?" Eulalie asked, with a radiant smile.

"No; I am an absolutely idle man, at present doing nothing."

"Oh, how delightful, how awfullee nice," she said, "to have nothing to do! How I should love it—always—always—always!"

"I believe it would pall in time," he replied. "There is not much pleasure in doing nothing when there is nothing that *ought* to be done. Well, I must not detain you"—addressing Mrs. Rosario—"you have engagements. Good evening."

"Good-bye," she cried, waving her yellow hands wildly. "Come early to-morrow—come and stay to dinner," she shrieked, as we drove rapidly away.

"Oh, what a beautiful young man!" cried Eulalie. "Oh, my gracious!—and your friend, Pamela."

"I know his people at home," I replied; "but they would not know me now," I added to my conscience.

"I can tell you who he is," added Jocasta, turning round and addressing the carriageful at the top of her voice. "He is the new Political Resident at Royapetta; he has taken up the regency till the little Rajah is of age.

His name is Thorold. He is very clever; he is staying at Government House. I heard it all from Lulu Baker; her brother does the clocks at Guindy."

There was quite a chorus of "Oh mys!" and the chaffing and chattering as we drove along sorely tried my self-control. I was poked in the ribs, and pinched on the arms, and called sly, and deep, and wicked, and *clever;* but at last Eulalie came to my rescue, and said—

"Never you mind them; I admire your taste. I never saw a man with such a haunting kind of face, or such interesting eyes."

It was in vain I protested that Mr. Thorold was only a slight acquaintance; my feeble voice was drowned immediately in five others. In spite of my splendid prospects, I had still my daily duty to fulfil, and that evening proved to be a busy one—the company did not separate till midnight. The following morning everything was late and out of gear, and when I returned at one o'clock from the bazaar, hot, dusty, and weary, I was informed by four voices speaking at once, that a grand lady in a beautiful brougham with two black arabs had been to call on me, and there was her card—well thumbed. I read on it, "Mrs. Dalrymple."

"And only think," cried Jocasta, "Sawmy was out; he had gone to the dhoby's house, and I took the card. She wore white kid gloves—*new* ones, and everything smelt of violets, and she was so beautiful. She smiled and said, 'Tell Miss Ferrars I am very sorry, and I shall come again;' and she nodded to me. Chinna Ayah knows her ayah; she says——"

"Hush!" I interrupted impatiently.

"Oh, only good things! She is very rich, and gives no

bother or makes bobbery; but she wears a false fringe, and——"

"Jocasta!" I cried, flying at her. "Repeat another tale, and I never speak to you again."

"Oh, you are so particular now, with your grand friends! other people like news." And Jocasta shrugged her shoulders and stalked off in the sulks.

Two visitors for me in one day—a feast or a famine. Four o'clock brought Mr. Thorold in a high dogcart, with a well-bred waler in the shafts; the harness, I was subsequently informed, indicated that the turn-out came from the stables of his Excellency the Governor. Where *would* "Rosario's" end?

As it was early in the afternoon, Mardie was strumming on the piano—she called it practising; Josephine, with her hair in curl-papers, was lying on a lounge, reading a novel, which was of as dark a complexion as herself. I wonder what the visitor thought of it all?—the bulging rafters, the tracks of armies of white ants, the smell of cocoanut-oil and dry rot, which abode for ever with us.

Mrs. Rosario, according to her custom, was superintending the milking. She was not presentable, so I received Mr. Thorold, and had the field to myself—save that Eulalie, Gwendoline, and Jocasta each made a separate errand into the room, and that the ayah, Mardie girl, and the cook were palpably peeping through the dining-room chick.

"I am so sorry Mrs. Dalrymple missed you to-day," he said, as he selected a seat. "I've brought you a note. She wants you to go and stay with her to-morrow."

"How kind of her!" I replied; "but it is impossible."

My thoughts flew to the keys, the dinners, my own

wardrobe. Since it had become so popular—loans being gifts in disguise—I had a very spare assortment of wearable toilets. Fortunately, my best white brocade, two or three white gowns, and a certain amount of shoes and gloves, still remained to me.

"There is no such word as 'impossible,'" he rejoined. "You will have to enter on your duties in ten days, and cannot go direct from one situation to another. You must have some breathing-time, and certainly owe yourself a holiday. Mrs. Dalrymple will take you about, and give you drives, and lots of good advice. She will cheer you up."

"But Mrs. Rosario?" I protested.

"Leave Mrs. Rosario to *me*," was the bold reply. "If she is the good-natured creature she looks, she will not stand in your way; and talk of an angel and you hear her wings. Here she comes," he added, as a solid footfall was audible on the matting, and Mrs. Rosario entered. She had dressed with incredible haste; her pocket-hole was hanging out, her bodice was hooked crooked; she looked warm, and was almost breathless.

"Oh my! I am sorry, but I have been so beesie. I am glad you came early. I hope you stay, and take us as you find us, and have pot-luck."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rosario," he answered; "I should be delighted. It is very good of you to invite me; but I am already engaged."

He now proceeded to make himself most agreeable to the flattered lady. I should never have forgiven him had he drawn out or ridiculed that truly kind soul; but he talked away about Nellore and Mysore cattle, actually like a dairy-man. He talked himself into Mrs. Rosario's

good graces; he talked of the north-west, of her favourite topic, the Royal Family—and of me.

"Miss Ferrars is looking very white and pulled down," he remarked abruptly.

"She will work too much; thatt is whatt I also tell her. I cannot get her to rest."

"A change will do her good, and I hope you will not be greatly inconvenienced if Miss Ferrars takes another situation."

"Oh my!" A long silence. Mrs. Rosario stared from him to me; at last she said, "Well, it was in our bargain, if she could better herself she should go. No, I will not stand in her way—no, I will not. She must push along; but I could cry."

"Of course Miss Ferrars will be sorry to leave you, who have been—been——" He hesitated for the word, which was instantly supplied.

"Yess, a mother to her. She will tell you herself."

"And I know you will be glad that she is getting an excellent post."

"Whatt post? where is she going?" she demanded excitedly.

"She is to be governess to the little Rajah of Royapetta and his two sisters. She has only to sign her name, and the matter is finished."

"Governess to the little Rajah! Oh my!" After a moment's dramatic pause, Mrs. Rosario got up and rushed into the next room, calling, "Eulalie, Gwendoline—girls! Come and hear the news. Pamella is going away to be governess to the Princes of Royapetta!"

Five of the girls trooped in simultaneously, and stood and stared. For his part, Mr. Thorold rose, unabashed,

and bowed. Then Eulalie flew at me and kissed me, and, turning round, said, with a little tremble in her voice—

"Sir, you have made us all proud, but very unhappy. How shall we spare her?"

"Yes, indeed," echoed Mrs. Rosario, sinking into a chair, and fanning furiously with a piece of Hummel's Exercises; "whatt shall I do? This house is now a big success; instead of boarders grumbling and dropping off, now they are quarrelling to come. They pay, they are pleased; everything is so clean, so good, so stylish"—waving her hand towards the flowers, the stained wall, the dirty ceiling-cloth. "Oh, thatt girl is wonderful; and she can bargain as well as any one, and get me seven seers of sugar for the rupee, and charcoal eight annas a maund—ghee for nothing."

"I am sure Miss Ferrars is a treasure," rejoined Mr. Thorold, with much gravity; "it is not every one who can get things for nothing. I am sorry for you, Mrs. Rosario, but I am afraid you will have to find a substitute at once. Mrs. Dalrymple is coming to take her away to-morrow, with your kind leave, for a little rest, such as you yourself recommend, before she enters on her new duties."

"To-morrow!" she repeated, letting her paper fall, as well as her jaw.

"Miss Ferrars will have to be at the palace by the end of next week, and I know that you would wish her to have a holiday." And his voice was positively seductive as he added, "Would you not?"

"She will leave us," beginning to whimper; "we shall never see her again—never, never!"

"It is not as if she were going to England—only to

Royapetta," he urged consolingly; "and I am sure you are delighted at her good fortune."

"The old Rani Sundaram is a terrible woman," struck in Jocasta the irrepressible. "Once people go into the palace, they never come out alive."

"Jocasta, you wicked girl!" screamed Mrs. Rosario; "for shame of you!—you shall be punished."

"Perhaps she has been reading 'Jack the Giant-Killer,'" suggested Mr. Thorold, good naturedly, "and got a little mixed."

But I knew otherwise. Jocasta had been imbibing, as usual, bazaar stories.

"Mrs. Dalrymple comes for you to-morrow at five o'clock," he said, turning to me. "Mrs. Rosario consents. Do you not, Mrs. Rosario?"

"Well, it is hard to say no to *you*," she admitted, with a watery smile. "I meant to have kept her as long as I could, and you have just talked her out of the house. Ah! you are a clevar young gentleman."

Then the "clevar gentleman" rose to depart. The leavetaking was extraordinarily protracted. Every one insisted on shaking hands with Mr. Thorold, Mrs. Rosario no less than three times; but at last he extricated himself from this crowd of well-wishers, and effected his escape. As Eulalie and I stood in the background in the drawing-room, watching him getting into the dogcart and taking up the reins, she put her arms round my neck and whispered—

"Some day you will marry Mr. Thorold, and you will make a handsome couple."

"A handsome fiddlestick!" I protested, indignantly. "Mr. Thorold is not thinking of a wife; he is not a ladies' man."

"Not for all ladies, but for one; *you* are his lady. I am sure it is so. Oh, yes, I am sure. You must ask me to the wedding. Oh, my gracious—look!"

Meanwhile Mr. Thorold was skimming down the drive at a great pace; the well-bred waler was pulling like a steam-engine, and just before he reached the gate he drew aside to escape collision with a dashing pair of horses and a stanhope phaeton, in which sat Ibrahim. Yes, it was nearly being an accident; the latter gave his steeds a sharp cut as he tore up to the bungalow, and discovered half the household in the verandah.

"Who was that?" he inquired, before he descended; "who is your fine visitor, who nearly smashed me up? I know his face."

And Jocasta, a breath before the others, answered—

"He is a friend of Pamela's. He has got her a splendid post. She is going to be governess to the Prince and Princesses of Royapetta. Won't she be grand?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM BLACKTOWN TO THE FORT

It was unnecessary for me to wait in order to hear Ibrahim's remarks, much less to receive his doubtful congratulations; these were despatched to me by the mouth of Gwendoline. There was far too much to do. I had to initiate Jocasta into the mysteries of the keys, the bazaar accounts, and bills; to show her where groceries were stored; to write down instructions. Only one thing was kept back from her, and that neither the sugar nor the mango jam, but the boarders' book must only be seen by the eye of Mrs. Rosario; were it to fall into the hands of Jocasta, all the secrets of the *ménage* would be blazoned in Blacktown, and become the common talk in the bazaar. Then there was my wardrobe to arrange—the scanty remains of what had been a good outfit. Eulalie, Gwendoline, and Josephine came in a body and heavily laden in order to restore various hats and dresses to which custom had endeared them, but I implored them to retain each and all as souvenirs of me. They were almost speechless from the combined emotions of astonishment and gratitude. They were nice, good girls, and I liked them; but I really could not undertake to don my belongings after they had worn them for weeks.

The news of my uplifting was noised abroad within three compounds. The very grass-cutters and chokedars had heard the wondrous tale; and as for our own suite, they were utterly demoralized—the fringe of my glory had touched them. What was I to wear when Mrs. Dalrymple came to bear me away in triumph? I believe the question raged even in the cook house, and was angrily contested between the ayah and the tannyketch. Mrs. Rosario was for an evening dress and cape, and white kid gloves. Gwendoline suggested a borrowed sealskin. I settled the matter by wearing a coat and skirt, a sailor hat and my best shoes. My luggage looked considerable, but the boxes were half empty and a fraud; if I did not leave my heart, at any rate I left the best part of my wardrobe behind me. I must now be permitted to draw a veil over the final scene, the impassioned partings, and will merely mention that Mrs. Rosario was so deeply affected, her tears so copious, her kisses so moist, that she threatened me with a cold in the head; and I believe she could have brought herself to present me with the Chittagong cock,—if I had anywhere to keep him. Fitz Alan and Alonzo returned specially early from office in order to bid me farewell, and at five o'clock precisely a neat victoria stopped under the porch. It contained Mrs. Dalrymple, who greeted me warmly, but did not descend.

"There is a cart coming for your luggage," she explained, "and I want to take you for a good long drive. I see you have said your good-byes. Why, *every* eye is red!"

Mine were also a little watery, as I took my seat beside her, and waved my adieus to the whole establishment

standing in a line on the verandah. I even saw the dhoby speeding me, and the cowman from the next house salaamed to the very dust as I was whirled out of the Rosario compound for the last time.

Major Dalrymple's quarters in the fort faced the sea. Curious old-world rooms, with bomb-proof walls, stone floors and stairs, cool and airy, and furnished with a taste and elegance that savoured more of an up-to-date London flat than the temporary home of a lady who followed the fortunes of a marching regiment. Everything in these grim old rooms was new and dainty. What various, various tenants had furnished and occupied them during the last two centuries! but I doubt if any one had embellished them as now. From Crundall's Road to St. George's Fort was like passing into another planet. Here, was military life, action, precision, punctuality, guns, bugles, drill, bands, and bustle; Major Dalrymple clanking up and down the stone stairs with spurred heels and clattering sabre; orderlies, telegrams, officials. There, was inaction, sloth, torpor, dust, and pleasure-seeking. And what a contrast between the graceful ayah who attended on me, in a snowy saree, with deep gold border (the special pattern prized of fashionable ayahs), her little short-sleeved silk jacket, her gold earrings and necklet, and Chinna the Grimy! Was it possible that this elegant creature, who talked English with a cockney accent, ever looked at, much less spoke to, our worm?

The ten days I spent with Mrs. Dalrymple flew. Never had I enjoyed myself so thoroughly in all my twenty-one years. I liked my hostess immensely; it did me good to talk to her. She was so merry and animated and clever. It was good to look at her, in her fresh white gowns, her

dainty bits of lace, and high-piled brown hair. She was a woman of fashion and the great world, who possessed the supreme gift of charm. She charmed all her acquaintance, she charmed the natives—the very dogs, she charmed me. She soothed my feelings, laid my vague anxieties to sleep; and though I am not of a demonstrative type, I appreciated her caresses and cool sweet kisses.

Mrs. Dalrymple was also practical. She helped me to lay out my hoarded rupees in pretty thin country-made silks, white muslins, and embroidery. She summoned six dirzees, who, officered by her own man, a bearded, turbaned patriarch, dressed airily in spotted cambric, squatted all day, composing my dresses from copies of her own. I was carried to garden-parties, tennis-parties, concerts, and picnics. As I now reclined in a London victoria, behind flying black arabs, precisely like one of the girls I had so bitterly envied, I often looked among the crowds on foot, in order to see if I could discern one miserable creature like my former self, but did not once behold her; there was no one of my class—no shabby-genteel, haggard lady; —the women were invariably gay Eurasians or soldiers' wives.

Mr. Thorold came from Government House, and stayed for two days in the fort, and during that time our acquaintance assumed a social footing and abandoned its former official attitude. We talked flippantly, we joked, we laughed, we disputed, we quarrelled and made it up. There were two little dinners given in his honour when he was with us, and one evening he accompanied Mrs. Dalrymple when we drove out round by the Adyar and home by the boiling beach. But it was not all laughing and jesting; there were some serious formalities connected

with my new situation. I was obliged to sign a document to furnish proof of my parentage—this was done by telegram—to submit the diplomas I had received at Munich, and to send my photograph. I bound myself to serve for two years, with a clause of escape in case of illness, and then Mr. Thorold took his departure to Royapetta, where he was to prepare the way for my reception.

I must confess that I felt loath to follow him, I was so truly contented in my present quarters. I enjoyed a little idleness. I liked what I saw of military life—the smart, well-set-up young subalterns coming and going, with their talk of shikar, polo, and leave, and ardent hopes of active service. I liked Major Dalrymple—a thin, dark man, with merry eyes, who never sat down except at meals, whose passion was rifle-shooting, his horror red tape, his favourite word the adverb "absolutely." He was absolutely unable to talk for five moments without bringing it in—it was his King Charles's head. It was "absolutely cool on the island," the soda-water was "absolutely hot," the adjutant's charger had "absolutely bucked him off," and "there was absolutely to be no camp of exercise at Bangalore." He was absolutely devoted to Olympia, his wife, and she to him.

As we drove home in the dark one evening, she told me how they had first met. It was at a regimental cricket-match.

"The dear fellow came and sat at my feet all the afternoon, with his tie at the back of his neck. They all declared that I had turned his head. In ten days' time he came to ask for my hand."

"That was short, sharp, and decisive," I exclaimed.

"Yes; we got it over quickly. I believe in the wooing that's short in doing."

"And in love at first sight?" I suggested.

"Oh, yes! Of course you don't, do you? You are much too sedate and self-controlled to do anything so wild."

"I have done some wild things."

"Yes; and made rather a mess of your life. If I had been at your elbow to advise, things would have gone better. For instance, I should have packed you home with Lady Elizabeth. My dear child, the old lady would have loved you, and made you her heiress."

"I don't want to be anybody's heiress," I protested.

"There you are! You will be beholden to no one! You'd rather remain a slave in Blacktown—and who was the better for it?"

"Mrs. Rosario," I answered, with a laugh. I could laugh now!

"I can assure you that it is rather agreeable to be an heiress. You must not despise the poor creatures; I was one myself."

Yes, I now recalled Jocasta's remark. Mrs. Dalrymple was rich.

"And that was not your only chance of going home," she added significantly. "Max tells me everything, you see. He and Arthur are like brothers, so of course I am his sister. I am devoted to him. He is so straight, and he has all the unbroken energies and keen interests of a man who has never wasted them on the epicurean joys of life. He gives our sex a wide berth, and it does seem a little hard that he should have a palace full of women thrust into his charge. He is godfather to our boy, and he has no secrets from *me*."

I felt my face becoming hot. Did Max tell her everything? Did he know everything himself?

"At first I thought you ought to have returned to England. In fact, I was going to take your passage. Think of that for impertinence. But, on second thoughts, I believe your remaining out here is all for the best at present."

"Why?" I inquired. "What do you mean?"

For a moment she hesitated, and then said, in a more constrained tone—

"I cannot explain, only I believe you will be much happier out here *now*. Of course your life will be secluded, your surroundings unusual, and you will not be able to get away whenever you please."

"Yes; but I am to be well paid for all that."

"Mercenary girl! Do you think so much of money?" she asked playfully.

"Yes; when I came to having but sixty rupees between myself and starvation, I thought a great deal of money. I respect it, but I do not love it."

"Neither do I, though it has smoothed my way in life. My old grandfather worshipped it, and I glean the result," she replied. "I am afraid you will be rather lonely at Royapetta; there are scarcely any Europeans, only a doctor, an engineer, and a few Government clerks."

"I shall be too busy to be lonely."

"Yes; and you will sometimes see—Max."

There was a significant pause before she uttered his name, and the loud rumbling over the drawbridge and through the tunnel into the fort drowned the remainder of the sentence.

Before leaving Madras I encountered Mrs. Rosario in

a shop, and found the poor woman in sore despair. Jocasta had proved to be worse than useless; she pilfered, she set the servants by the ears, the meals were late, and wretchedly bad—"and only think, last night there was no oil for the lamps, and this morning there was no sugar!" and tears stood in her eyes as she related this enormity.

I was not surprised to hear that Frederick was black with rage, that he and the Van Lede boys had given formal notice. Humiliated Mistress Rosario! they were going over to Chambers's in a body. What was she to do?

"Get rid of Jocasta at once," was my advice, "and take the reins of government into your own hands;" and with this cold comfort I was compelled to leave her.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PALACE OF ROYAPETTA

The hour of my departure struck at last, and I left Madras for Royapetta at daybreak one morning, the distance between the two cities being seventy miles. The pace was funereal—about twelve miles an hour—and the time seemed long. How tired I became of the endless cactus hedge, emerald green stretches of paddy-fields, the pagoda-shaped temples, and even of the occasional regiments of gigantic stone horsemen!

It was after twelve o'clock when I arrived at Bowenpillay Junction, which was situated in the dominions of his Highness the Rajah of Royapetta. Here I was evidently expected, for I was received with considerable ceremony by the Baboo station-master, perhaps because I represented the only first-class passenger! But, at any rate, a magnificent individual, in yellow and black livery, was in attendance, and also an emblazoned close carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid horses. The seats of the brougham were upholstered in yellow morocco leather, the door-handles were of gilt (or gold); but the harness was rusty and mended with string, and beneath the body of the superb equipage was tied a rope net full of grass,

precisely the same as is carried by a country "jutka." What a mixture of squalor and magnificence!

We soon left the station of Bowenpillay and clouds of white dust behind us, and drove away towards some distant hills at the speed of a fire-engine, galloping along at a breakneck pace—everything, vehicles, foot passengers, and animals, clearing nervously out of our road as we swept onward; I could not help wondering what would happen were the string-mended harness to give way. The country we charged through looked both rich and cultivated. I noticed fertile crops of rice and cotton, dense toddy and mango topes, as well as numerous pagoda-shaped temples, for I was now in a Hindoo state. After more than an hour's galloping we reached Royapetta, a large straggling city, exhibiting many more temples, also narrow streets blocked with traffic and sacred cows, gay bazaars—loud with tongues and tom-toms—stagnant tanks, flat houses, and high walls, overtopped by palm trees and bananas waving languidly in the breeze.

At length we came to a blank wall, higher and more imposing than any, and presently turned under a great gateway, where two sentries solemnly saluted us; in another moment we were driving across the palace courtyard—at least, I concluded that this must be the palace, a palace whose sole pretension to such dignity lay in its enormous size. Far up in the walls were rows of latticed windows, and at the corners were covered-in balconies, minarets, and towers, and here and there on the edge of a flat roof protruded a sort of pillared summer-house.

I descended at a door at the opposite side of the court, the carriage with its lathered horses departed, and here the gorgeous attendant and I waited alone. How quiet it

was after the thunder of hoofs, the hum of the city, the blare of the bazaar! it was more like the precincts of a nunnery, or a house of the dead, than a great Hindoo palace with hundreds of living inmates. The heat was intense—it was about one o'clock,—the very shadows in the courtyard seemed to shrink in a gigantic, blinding glare; it was apparently the hour when all living creatures were asleep. I looked around on this huge grey building steeped in silence, and my heart trembled, my spirits recoiled from a hideous but momentary impression that I was standing in the neighbourhood of some cruel, savage animal—which, for the moment, slumbered.

The iron-studded door stood open at last, and a tall, elderly woman in a dark saree appeared. She had a pair of burning black eyes which seemed to devour me; then she salaamed profoundly, and said in English, "Please come this way." The great door was closed behind me with a re-echoing clang, the sunshine was shut out, and I was now inside the palace, and totally cut off from the outer world; but should I not find a world here—a world seething with curiosity, intrigue, and tyranny?

The lofty hall we entered was evidently one of the state apartments, the floor was entirely covered with white cotton cloth called "dosooti," enormous chandeliers of cut glass hung from the ceiling, and many coloured crystal balls dangled aimlessly at intervals; the walls were lined with crude portraits of the ancestors of the present Rajah—generally represented on superb horses covered with jewelled trappings, and themselves attired to correspond. There was a rich suite of gilt furniture upholstered in yellow satin; a table of solid silver stood in a conspicuous position. But for all its magnificence

the place had a dingy and neglected appearance. The light was faint and came from venetian shutters, as usual, high in the wall. I followed the tall woman, whose feet made no sound—which fact, combined with her skeleton leanness, gave me the impression of being guided by a ghost—through three similar apartments, all glittering dimly with dusty chandeliers, into an immense room with a marble floor, and lined with mirrors strangely set in brilliantly coloured plaster.

"The hall of audience," murmured my guide, with a tinge of condescension in her manner as she hurried me across it.

So far there was no sign or sound of life—we might be passing through the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. At last we came to a long passage lit by small windows; here and there was a niche blackened with smoke of ages from the primitive lamp with floating wick; then we began to ascend wide stairs, all covered in white cotton, and entered a corridor into which many rooms opened. I glanced into one or two, and beheld piles of pillows and mats. In the twilight we still proceeded steadily, and passed through a network of passages and stairs, through lines of empty chambers; finally I was suddenly ushered into a corner room of fair size and height, the floor of which was covered with rich carpets. Reclining among a pile of yellow satin cushions was a pretty, girlish figure, who waved her hand to me and indicated a shabby old basket-chair (a Rosario chair) which had evidently been introduced for my accommodation.

"This is the Rani Gindia, the mother of his Highness," explained my escort in excellent English; and to the Rani she said, "Here is the woman."

Her Highness was a pretty creature of about my own age, with a soft, indolent expression and languid eyes; these were extensively got up, and her teeth and eyelids were darkened according to the custom of her race. She wore, although a widow, a crimson silk cloth, strings of pearls, and a bodice heavy with gold and jewelled embroidery, her waist girdled by emeralds, and many bangles of great price jingled on her beautiful arms. She smiled a welcome as I sat down, and I felt that I need have no fears respecting the Rani Gindia; but she was not the only woman present. There was a shabby, aged beldame wrapped in a white cloth which almost covered her from head to foot; she sat smoking a jewelled huka—silent, aloof, detached. Suddenly she turned her face on me: it bore more resemblance to the countenance of some caged malignant animal than that of a fellow creature; it was the face of an old, brooding eagle. The features were high, the nose aquiline, the mouth lipless, the eyebrows were still black though the hair was snow white, the skin like parchment, and the eyes—the malevolent basilisk eyes—they frightened me. This terrible old woman was the first to break the silence; she made some low remark in a strange tongue, sniggered, and resumed her huka as if I were not present.

"You are the English governess?" said the Rani, in a soft, low voice; "and Mr. Thorold, the resident, wishes you to be the teacher of his Highness, and to instruct his sisters?"

"Yes, your Highness."

"He can speak for you; he says you are clever, well born, young and virtuous—and that we may depend on you entirely."

"I hope so," I replied rather haughtily.

"It is strange that a lady of your class, so well born, and so well looking, should be alone in this land seeking her bread!"

Here the ogress again pulled the huka from her mouth and made some ribald remark, for the little Rani laughed merrily, and said—

"Her Highness the Rani Sundaram asks if Mr. Thorold is not your lover?"

So that was the dreaded Rani—the old woman with the huka!

"No," I returned, blushing hotly; "I have no lover. Mr. Thorold is but an acquaintance."

"Do not mind; it is only the old Rani's joke!—she means no harm," said the Rani Gindia. "She likes your face, and so do I. You play music well, I am told, and teach English and French, and embroidery, and the guitar."

"Yes," I answered stiffly, for I did not appreciate these palace jokes.

"You are twenty-two and not married?—how strange it is!"

(Perhaps if she knew all it would appear still stranger.)

"I was married when I was eight years old," announced the Rani Gindia. And she plied me with many questions, whilst a woman fanned her with an enormous fan of peacocks' feathers; and I noticed half-a-dozen pairs of eyes peeping in at the door. "Would you like to see the children?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes," I assented; "I should, if it is possible."

"I hope they will not be very troublesome; they know some English from the Munshi."

Then she began to chatter about the world outside,

and displayed an unexpected taste for the marvellous and horrible. What strangely distorted tales of Europeans had come to her ears! The children—two girls and the boy—presently appeared. They had small features and fair skins, and it was difficult to tell the sex, as they were dressed alike in satin trousers and jacket, and all wore caps; their eyes were stained, their lips and palms reddened. They stared at me exhaustively, and examined my hat and gloves with an interest that was almost pathetic; then began to tease their mother for sweets and sherbet, and the eldest girl found her mother's huka, and desired a fat old attendant to blow it up for her. Presently some richly dressed ladies of the household entered; they had all come to have a look at me. Truly there was not much to see, for I was tired, travel-stained, and dusty. All at once the company was startled by the cry of "Purdah! Purdah!" and the curious, chattering crowd of women hastily laid hands on their veils and fled. The little Rani Gindia drew half her veil over her head, but the old woman remained immovable and smoked on stolidly.

After more than amply sufficient warning, three gentlemen were ushered in with impressive ceremony—one old man, who strongly resembled the Rani Sundaram, but was thin, small, and so shrivelled, he looked like a mummy or a wizard; the only thing that indicated vitality was his eyes—these were two flames. He wore a white turban and a painfully tight black velvet robe, *à la princesse*, girdled with a gold belt covered with ill-cut, flat rubies. The younger man was tall, handsome, portly, and had a pleasant countenance; he was dressed in a short purple-and-gold tunic, and a yellow turban. The third was a

mere lad, a secretary of no account. The two elder were the Rajah's uncles; the wizard—in other words Durigodana—was the brother of the Rani Sundaram; the stout, smiling gentleman was the little Rani's brother, and his name was Shumsha Lal—and both had come to inspect me.

"Ah, you are Miss Ferrars?" said the younger in a cordial voice, "the English lady with the best certificates?"

I merely bowed, for I felt tongue-tied. And *how* they all stared!

"I think you will answer beautifully," resumed the stout gentleman. "What do you say?"—turning to his coadjutor. But Durigodana merely grunted fiercely in reply.

"I hope you may be comfortable, and I have given orders myself; Begur is responsible."

He talked English with easy fluency, and assured me, smilingly, that "Thorold was a very good fellow, a capital polo-player, and that having him in the city was great fun."

I wondered if the aged Rani Sundaram and her brother understood and corroborated this statement?

And now some richly dressed visitors were arriving, their arrival heralded with immense precautions. The men departed, I was given leave to go, and Begur, the guide, reconducted me once more through this rabbit-warren of a palace. I felt confident that I should never know my way about; it seemed as if we had walked a mile before we reached my suite. It consisted of one large room with a latticed gallery running all round it under the roof; a screen divided it into two parts. One half contained a punkah, a small piano, table, chairs, lamps, and crockery;

the other a bed, dressing-table, and almirah, with an adjoining bath-room. This composed my suite. My attendants were immediately introduced—"Moonasawmy," a low-caste Hindoo, as cook general; Ragee ayah, who was probably of the sweeper caste, and of the type of Chinna ayah.

My boxes were on their way, Begur assured me, also that I must give my own orders for food; and that at ten o'clock next morning the royal children would come for their lessons. When she had flitted out like a bat I ordered tea; and in due time it made its appearance—palace tea, unknown elsewhere—a slaty-white mixture in which floated long sticks of cinnamon; the mere sight of the beverage was revolting. Fortunately I had a spirit-lamp, also some orange pekoe—a thoughtful gift from Mrs. Dalrymple; I made a brew of the real article, and felt much refreshed. Then I busied myself unpacking and arranging, despite of a continuous hustling and chattering, which came from the enclosed gallery over my head. How many eyes were there watching me? At any rate, when I shook out my white brocade I was complimented by a loud buzz of admiration. The windows in my apartment were high up in the walls; I had no means of seeing down below into the courtyard, or of catching a glimpse of the blue sky, or the tops of the green palms which waved serenely in the breeze—sight, air, and the life of the outside world were now rigorously excluded. "Could I endure this existence?" I asked myself as I arranged my property. At one moment "No," at another "Yes." "No," when I recalled the old Rani's eyes, the wizard's grunt, the flocks of invisible, whispering women; "Yes," when I reflected on the large

salary, the little Rani Gindia's kind expression, Mr. Thorold's assurances.

Presently I discovered among my parcels a packet of new books. My heart beat foolishly as I recognised his firm handwriting.

Oh, yes; the answer was "Yes."

CHAPTER XXX

THE FEAST OF LANTERNS

My three pupils, the Rajah Kodappa and his sisters, Lucksmi and Varuna, were docile little people, and by no means the handful I had anticipated. At first their attitude was possibly due to awe, but this was soon superseded by a ravenous curiosity respecting me, my former career, and my present belongings. I had some difficulty in stemming their stream of questions and diverting their attention from my hands, my shoes, and my writing-case. A stylographic pen afforded them ecstatic joy, and so did my guitar —in fact, it was only by a promise to play to them for a long time that we accomplished any lessons. The eldest girl was sharp, clever, and observant, but a minx. Varuna, aged five, was soft, round, infantile, and dull; she would probably develop into a palace beauty! The little sovereign, Kodappa, was extremely intelligent, with his mother's sweet eyes, but he was delicate, inquisitive, and terribly restless.

I had been accorded *carte blanche* in the matter of books, and had brought with me a large consignment from Higginbotham's in Madras: kindergarten publications, pictures, stories, maps. It was my aim to offer

instruction and amusement combined, and in this I was confident I should succeed. When two gorgeous attendants came to summon my pupils, they departed with a reluctance that was unquestionably flattering to me; but I was a novelty, and I must not be vainglorious.

"The Rani, my mother, likes you," whispered Lucksmi, as she held my hand and carefully examined my nails devoid of henna. "The Rani Sundaram says you are handsome, and *very* wicked."

Was I to find another Jocasta within my small circle? I resolved at once to nip these confidences in the bud.

"Your Royal Highness," I said firmly, releasing my hand, "must learn never to repeat to one person what another has said of them."

"But it's what we do all day," she remonstrated—"my mother, the Rani Gindia, and every one. Where is the harm? What else can one talk of?"

"Many things, as you will find out when you read books. At any rate, I must insist that you never repeat remarks to me."

"Oh!" she exclaimed in surprise; "but I could tell you some good words they said."

"No; neither good nor bad. I hate tale-bearing. And now, if you like, I will tell you a fairy tale."

I spoke Telagu, helped out with English (Telagu, the Italian of India), and each day, as my quick-witted pupils progressed, there was less Telagu and more English.

I suppose there was some truth in Mr. Thorold's remark that I could adapt myself to circumstances; and in a short time I had settled down as one of the inmates of the Royapetta Palace. That there were hundreds of others I was well aware; I heard them whispering in the gallery,

or crowding, chattering, and scrambling outside my door when I played the piano or guitar. I also encountered women of all ages and all degrees in the passages and stairs which led to the garden. These sometimes spoke, sometimes smiled, sometimes stared—old bent cronies, little half-naked children, young and beautiful women. I was well supplied with books, papers, and flowers—presumably by Mr. Thorold—and between my pupils, piano, and literature, and daily airing, the days passed quickly enough.

After several attempts I had mastered the intricacies of the palace maze, and could find my way to the state rooms and the gardens. Here I wandered every evening, enjoying the air and the really exquisite scene. The walks were paved with white marble, marble summer-houses and pavilions gleamed among dwarf forests of palms, guava trees, pomegranates, and brilliant crotons; and everywhere was the sound of running water and the perfume of the most delicate flowers. I chose the hours for my visit to this fairy-like spot when the women of the palace were likely to be indoors, either playing pachesi or paying their devotions, or at the bath; but occasionally some of the young ones would throng the paths, chattering and screaming, and playing childish games as ancient as Krishna himself.

The first break in the monotony of routine was the occasion of the "devali," or Feast of Lanterns: it is the annual festival in honour of Lucksmi, goddess of prosperity, when every Hindoo displays a light in his house in order to propitiate her favour for the coming year; it is when a Hindoo city looks its best. The whole interior of the palace was humming like one huge hive. The little Rajah, with the sacred ashes daubed upon his forehead, was carried

down to do Puja in the "Tosha Khana," or treasure house. A durbar was held in the great hall, and at night the city and bazaar was a blaze of lights. The masses of dusty glass chandeliers in the state rooms now came into use, and exhibited thousands of flaming candles. I ventured down, partly to post a letter and partly on purpose to see this transformation; and in the durbar hall I was surprised to find Mr. Thorold, who, it appeared, had come to see me. It was the first time we had met since we had stayed together in Fort St. George.

"I despatched a messenger to ask if you were visible," he said, coming towards me; "and I began to be afraid it was 'Durwaza bund'" (the door is shut), "since he has been gone half an hour."

"No," I replied. "In Madras we say 'Missus can't see;' but I have not had any message. I came down by accident to look at the illuminations."

"A lucky accident for me," he said. "I came to inquire how you are getting on?"

"Very well, thank you. I am quite satisfied."

"And they are satisfied with you; I hear the children are your slaves. I hope you have not thought me remiss in not calling sooner, but I believed you would do better if I kept out of the way; natives have curious prejudices. Of course, if you were in any trouble or difficulty, I am always at hand. You know that?"

"Yes, thank you," I replied; "and it is much better that I should try and stand without a prop."

"You always do that, don't you?" he said, with a smile.

As I glanced at him I was suddenly sensible of a great alteration in his appearance. His face was white and worn,

his eyes were bright but sunken, his clothes seemed to hang on him. All this was abundantly evident as we stood together under one of the chandeliers.

"You look as if *you* wanted a prop," I remarked abruptly. "You look as if you could hardly stand. Let us sit," and I led the way to two of the yellow arm-chairs.

"The fact is," he replied, sinking back with an appearance of relief, "I have had rather a bad go of malaria, and it pulls one to pieces in no time. Nothing makes one feel so cheap as the fever that burns up one's bones. I've been working hard besides, and the durbar this morning was about the last straw."

"I hope it was not quite that," I said, for his pallor was really alarming. "What does the Residency doctor say?"

"Old Fleming! He says I am to go off to the hills to-morrow, and stay there for ten days at least. It's a most awful nuisance just now; but if I don't obey him he declares it will be a case of collapse and sick leave to England; and *that*," suddenly sitting up and looking at me, "would never do."

"No, I suppose it would not," I acquiesced vaguely.

"However, I did not come here to inflict you with my symptoms," he continued, with an effort; "but I just wanted to know how you were getting on, and if you had everything you wanted, and if they were all civil, and that sort of thing, before I went away."

"It was very kind of you to come," I replied; "and I must also thank you for your truly generous supply of books and flowers."

"And notes?" he supplemented gaily.

"No, I have never received any notes."

He raised his eyebrows in evident surprise, and then said, "They were not much loss—mere notes of interrogation. But it shows that there is 'something rotten in the state of Denmark.' Eh?"

"There is something very peculiar about the post, too. Or *is* there a post?" I inquired. "I have never received one letter, and I doubt if mine are delivered."

"As for no post, Miss Ferrars, I cannot allow such an affront to our civilization to pass unreprimanded. We have two deliveries a day," he replied. "Your messenger must be very slack; or is there"—dropping his voice—"a censor?"

"I think there is," I replied. "I have two letters in my pocket now. I thought of giving them to some outsider."

"I am the outsider; here you are!" and he held out his hand. "As for the censor, we must look into that. It is the Rani Sundaram," he added, "and she is a very strong factor in this family. She has claws. 'Touch not the cat but with the glove,'" he quoted, with a short laugh. "However, she will not come in your way."

"Nor I in hers, I humbly trust. I am not ashamed to confess that I am afraid of her."

"So is every one; you are in the best of company. She allows nothing and no one to stand in her path when she has any particular aim or crime in view."

"Do you imagine that *you* stand in her path?" I asked in a low voice, as I looked at his handsome, haggard face.

"I do not imagine it; I am certain of the fact. I have established myself; in fact, I have encamped upon her high road, which leadeth to destruction, and we shall foul

of one another some day, I foresee, and have a pitched battle."

"She will be glad to get you out of Royapetta, even for ten days?" I said.

"Yes, I wish I could hang on here; but this malaria, and all the quinine I have swallowed, have made my head feel like a brass band, and my eyes play me all sorts of tricks. For instance, as you sit there, you keep coming and going. I have my work cut out, and so have you. You will have to put up with a good deal; but I know you will bear it without flinching, and your influence must tell in the long run. You won't desert your post, will you?"

"No."

"Give me your hand on that."

I took his hand. It was like a hot coal.

"You won't desert the boy; now is the time when he sucks in good impressions like a thirsty plant, and these, in spite of heredity and other influences, must bear fruit among his people in the future. He has a fine disposition, and some good blood in his veins."

"What is the history of the family?" I asked.

"Oh, their history is long, vague, and variegated. To begin to relate it would take a week. Wars, intrigues, victories, defeats. They are soldiers even now. Two fine young men of the family are anxious to offer their swords to the crown of India, and to take service and commissions in a regiment of native cavalry, in order to see something of the world and other fighting men, but the Rani Sundaram intervenes."

"How can she prevent them?"

"She swears that if they leave this state, she will come down from behind the purda."

"Then I should let her!"

"Ah! you don't know. To 'let her,' as you express it, would promote the most unheard-of scandal—a scandal whose effects would ripple to every Hindoo court."

"And so the young men must languish in idleness?"

"Yes," he admitted, with an impatient sigh.

"And the women who swarm like flies, who are they?"

"Relatives, servants, slaves," he answered briefly.

"They too are idle, and spend their days gossiping, bathing, eating."

"Yes, eating up the people and the revenues. At some courts the women are extremely accomplished; they read English as well as Indian literature, they play the piano and the vina, and embroider; but here we are old-fashioned, because the chief influence is old. She is a wonderful woman for intrigues and alliances. Lucksmi, your pupil, is to be married the first moon in March."

"And she is but seven years of age."

"Yes, it is the custom. She is making a good marriage, though she has not a large dower."

"But I thought the family were enormously rich?"

"There are enormous treasures in the Tosha Khana; it is crammed with gold and silver, and trappings and jewels, but it is a point of honour to add to these, and to live and die in debt."

"How foolish! How wicked!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"You see, one court vies with another in the race of extravagance. Horses and carriages from England, jewels, entertainments, bribes, follies. One rajah spent one million rupees on the marriage feasts of a favourite pigeon."

I heard the loud rumble of carriages in the outer

courtyard, which signified the return of the household, who had driven into the city to view the illuminations.

"They are coming," I said, hastily rising, "and I must fly."

"But why?" he protested. "You are not a Purda-Nashin or Cinderella."

"All the same, I wish to go. I hope your trip to the hills will do you no end of good."

I heard voices, and steps. I even imagined that I caught a glimpse of Shumsha Lal's portly figure and yellow turban, and before Mr. Thorold could answer I was gone. I glanced back from the dim passage, and saw him standing in that great durbar hall alone; a rather forlorn figure, this man, who at present ruled the ancient state of Royapetta.

* * * * *

When I reached my room I discovered that no fewer than three lamps were burning upon the table, and two were glimmering aloft from the narrow windows.

"I furnished these lights," said Moonasawmy, advancing with a salaam, "in order that Miss Sahib, too, may find favour with the goddess and have much fortune during the coming year."

But unfortunately for his good wishes, the goddess of Fortune had hitherto studiously ignored my existence!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RANI SUNDARAM JESTS

WHEN the first somewhat startling novelty of my new situation wore off, I began to find my life decidedly monotonous, and to realize my isolation, and feel that I should like to penetrate beyond the garden. I intimated as much to Begur, my duenna, associate, and spy, but she immediately informed me that the Political Agent was such a miser that there were not enough carriages for the ladies of the court—I was aware that they paid many visits in closely-shut broughams—"but she would see if I could not drive some day soon."

How I yearned and pined to get out from beyond the palace, even if it was only to see a mud hovel and a paddy field—anything that had no high wall! One day I ventured as far as the great door, intending to open it, and hire a common gharry; but the huge lock was fastened, and when I asked for the keys, Begur, who had followed swiftly on my heels, merely shook her head, and laughed.

"Then I am a prisoner!" I exclaimed angrily.

"Oh, no, no! The Miss Sahib could of course get out when it was convenient. She was a member of the court, and must not be seen abroad on foot—that would bring

great shame. Some other day all would be arranged." And it was always "some other day." I felt like the thrush who cried, "I can't get out, I can't get out!" The little Rani now began to notice me. She used to beg me to play the guitar, and to tell her stories the same as to the children: her favourite tale was "Cinderella and the Glass Slipper." She herself was but a grown-up child, and she would take off my jewelry, and examine it every time as if she had never seen it before. I wore a good deal, as nothing more impresses a native's mind than a brave display. My poor little display was far from brave, but at least the Moorish necklet was unique, and the cat's-eye brooch was valuable. The Rani Gindia took me under her special protection, perhaps because the children liked me, and I accompanied her occasionally in drives in the state carriage. I saw but little. The atmosphere was stuffy, and laden with cedar oil; but at least I enjoyed the happy sensation of being *out*. More than once I had noticed Begur alone in the bazaars, and though her head was muffled up in a cloth, it was evident that she had more liberty than the others. I believe she was frequently in the city afoot, and at unholy hours.

In fact, the little Rani hinted as much, and added "Miss Sahib, I will tell you a big secret. I hate Begur, but the Rani Sundaram esteems her." I could see that in her humble way Begur exercised great power: she coaxed those below her, and flattered those above her. She was the friend of all—that is to say, of none. Spare, active, good-humoured, shrewd, and sly, her whole life, and the breath of her nostrils, was intrigue and deception, perhaps harmless except for its morality—perhaps not!

My cook Moonasawmy was a low-caste man, not nearly

as able as dirty Sawmy. His cooking was strange and pungent, he was absolutely devoid of manners, and could be insolent; but I was aware that my comfort depended on him, and consumed the smoke of my anger. Of late he had been most civil and obliging, and this was due to a circumstance which occurred about a month after I had arrived. The demoniacal noises, hasty footsteps, and sharp screams that resounded up and down the passage at night had at first alarmed me; but as my door was firmly bolted, I had become used to these extraordinary and mysterious sounds—habit is second nature—and I now enjoyed unbroken slumber. But one night, there was a loud scratching outside, and a hammering and a pitiful crying to come in. I jumped up, for the sobs were heart-breaking, opened the door, and a woman sprang into the room, then hastily shut and bolted it, and fell breathless at my feet. I lit my lamp and surveyed her. She was in a dreadful plight: her clothes were torn, her face was bruised, her hands were bleeding—she had been savagely ill-used somewhere. She could not speak or answer my questions, but her great dark eyes were eloquent with a tale of pain and fear. This strange woman was young and good-looking, and she lay panting on the ground like some wounded animal. As she lay she started, and so did I, for I heard steps—many steps—flying headlong down the passage. Did they play hide-and-seek among this maze of rooms for people's lives?

The fugitive remained prone and motionless. I covered her with a rug, I brought her water, I sat by her till I could no longer keep my eyes open. When I awoke the next morning she was gone. It appeared that she was the daughter of Moonasawmy; she had got into

trouble in the palace. This much he vouchsafed, also his thanks. Moonasawmy was grateful. He was all that remained of my "suite," for the ayah had merely hovered around me, prying and pilfering, and I had dispensed with her services at once.

I had been now three months in the palace; the little Rajah was making wonderful progress, and had far outdistanced his sisters. He was a dear little man-child, with the trustfulness of one and the dignity of the other. He was well aware that he was the Rajah of Royapetta, and that in a year's time he would be married. He liked to drive out in state with his uncle, surrounded by his sowars, and receive the homage of his subjects; and he also liked to come and sit on my knee with his arms round my neck, and look at my watch, and listen to stories of little boys of his age far away in my country across the Kala Pani. Although I saw the Rani Gindia almost daily, it had been my fortune never again to encounter the all-powerful Sundaram, before whom every heart in the palace quailed.

I was hoping that she never quitted her own apartments; but I was wrong. She drove abroad daily, visiting and intriguing among other noble Hindoo families, and occasionally I had seen her afar off in the garden, and fled.

One afternoon I found her installed in her daughter-in-law's room, and here flight was impossible, for I had come by invitation. She sat on a rug hunched up round her huka, and as she turned her head, and shot a swift fierce glance at me, she gave me again the impression of a fierce old eagle brooding on her nest. From the sound of a harsh voice, which had abruptly ceased when I made my appearance, I gathered that the old Rani had been lecturing

her relative. I stood for some time awaiting notice, but the Rani Gindia was in tears, and speechless. I was about to withdraw, but she stretched forth a persuasive hand; possibly in my presence she felt some protection. I looked around for my usual seat, the cane chair.

"Sit on the floor!" commanded the old Rani; "what is good for a Princess of Royapetta is good enough for a servant." To my amazement she spoke English.

I made no attempt to obey her order, but stood and watched her as she squatted by her pipe. I met without flinching the glance that all feared.

"Ho! thou of the proud eyes," she continued, "'tis as she averred," pointing to her daughter-in-law. "Strange, that a woman of thy class should come to our country and eat our bread."

"Not strange, your Highness, since I have my bread to earn. I am poor."

"Poor!" and she surveyed me with an evil look. "And yet the rich, handsome Englishman spoke for thee. He said thou wert to be depended on. By the gods! the man hath a bold heart and a face of brass when he sends to our court a young woman, who is a minstrel, with a face as brazen as his own—and who is his paramour. But of a truth, these English dogs have no shame!"

For a moment I could not speak for a sudden quick pulse which was beating in my throat. Then I laid violent hands upon my self-command.

"I perceive that it brings black shame to take service under aught but the British raj," I answered boldly. "English folk do not slander strangers thus,—and throw mud."

"Peace!" she shrieked; "the Agent is thy lover, and thou art his spy. He has sent thee here to carry to his ear false tales of the palace doings."

"It is not true," I replied; "I know naught of the palace doings, thank God! I speak the truth, but the air here is laden with lies."

"The air of a truth is laden with eyes, and thou art false as are all thy race. On the night of the Devali thou wert in the Hall of Audience alone with thy lover. Behold, I saw thee. There was low talk, and whispers, and looks, and hand-meetings. There were, moreover, two letters given by thee to him."

"Yes; they were my letters to my friends."

"They were the palace secrets! There was also talk of me — the Rani Sundaram — which was not good talk."

This was true, and I felt my face blaze.

"Truly thou art an evil-doer, and a spy."

"I am no spy," I answered, "and I will not suffer such speech, were you the Empress of India. I renounce my office, and I return to Madras to-morrow, or, better still, to-day."

"Bah! thou white-faced idiot, thou art here; thy word is written on the deed. Thy master hath given his pledge—thy teaching is clever—the princes speak favourably of thee. Thy ways will be watched, and since thou art a fool, therefore thou wilt serve."

"I shall leave!" I answered sharply, flinging my promise to Mr. Thorold to the winds.

"Try!" was her laconic reply.

"I shall appeal to the Government!" I said, secretly shaking with agitation.

"Try!" she repeated, and her face was malevolence itself. "Nay, I am the Government—at least within the palace—whilst the breath is in me."

As she spoke, the old fury suddenly rose to her full height; and although she wore her saree drawn up between her shrunken legs, after the manner of high-caste Brahmin women of the south, nevertheless she contrived to look majestic.

I meanwhile leant with my back against the wall, and my hands tightly clasped behind me. There was a quick interchange of gabble in a strange tongue between the Rani Gindia and herself, and the older woman turned and surveyed me. My breath was coming fast, my temper was aflame; I met her glance eye to eye. I looked at her as I would at some wicked animal who dared to confront me. For a moment she stood before me, wrapping her cashmere cloth around her spare person.

"I did but jest, thou panther's cub!" she said. "It was but the play of an old woman—a jest. By the name of Siva, naught now is left to me but talk."

And she gathered her long draperies more closely around her attenuated form, and stalked out of the apartment; but I remained where she had left me, standing with locked hands and scarlet cheeks, shattered by the violence of my own emotions.

"I pray thee, do not mind the Rani Sundaram," said her daughter-in-law, "nor yet Durigodana, nor yet Begur. They hate the English. She talked thus to anger thee; it is her pleasure, as it is also to torment the wild animals in their cages. She has no desire to have thee depart, but only to vex thee. I love thee, Miss Sahib, so do also my children. Do not leave us for a few bad words; it was

naught to what"—lowering her voice—"she saith to others —yea, even to *me*."

I recalled Mr. Thorold's speech: "You will have to put up with some unpleasantness." He little dreamed that the unpleasantness would be connected with himself!

"Only one more word," whispered my friend, whose eyes were wet. "Sundaram doth not love the Resident. He takes too much out of her hands; but *I* know that his hands are clean, that he is honourable, and that he truly serves my son. He is a strong man, and just. If thou wilt agree not to see him, it will be better for him and thee. I think no bad thoughts; but in the Rani Sundaram's eyes all are evil-doers, save the gods."

CHAPTER XXXII

"THE FORT OF THE FOUR WINDS"

It seemed as if the terrible scene at which the Rani Gindia had been a witness drew the cords of her sympathy closer to me; we both suffered from the same dread influence. A "fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," and I soon realized the agreeable results, and was aware that the little Rani exercised her personal interest as far as possible in my behalf. I now received occasional letters from without—from Mrs. Dalrymple, Mrs. Rosario, and Mr. Evans. Even Linda wrote to me. So much for the favouring breezes of prosperity! The news of my "fine appointment" had caught her ears, and she wished to know if I could obtain orders for Cora to paint the ladies of the court? also, would I send her some real Madras muslin and some pretty draperies? and remained my fondly attached cousin, Linda.

I had no lack of drives in these fortunate times. The Rani Gindia often requested me to accompany her when she went out in a close carriage into the city. I cannot say that I enjoyed anything beside the honour of her society. The heat, the din, the glare, the sweet-shops black with flies, the gaudy, pushing, clamouring crowd,

the atmosphere of incense, stale flowers, cow-dung and ghee, were not to my taste. I longed, with a craving that almost amounted to a thirst, for the open country; and of late my cravings were gratified. We drove to various ancient forts, tombs, and temples that were scattered within twenty miles of Royapetta; the landau would be open, and as we tore along her Highness suffered the wind to blow on her delicate face and ruffle her smooth hair, when there was no eye to see. The princesses of Southern India—where the track of the conqueror has not so often passed—are less strictly veiled than their sisters in the north. More often I had the two little Ranis for my companions on these expeditions, and with them I made many delightful excursions to wonderful ruins, once the proud abode of great kings, built as though to last for ever, but now unwept, unhonoured, and unsung—lacking the shreds of a history, and sometimes even the respect of a name.

I found one day on my writing-table a note from Mr. Thorold, which I took up with considerable surprise and pleasure. No, it had not been previously opened.

"Dear Miss Ferrars,

"I have not seen you for two months. When I am in the Palace, and ask for you, the invariable answer is, 'The Miss Sahib is engaged'—or indisposed. I hope that you are not really indisposed to receive me? The other alternative is even worse—that you are ill. Pray let me have one line. If you will leave the answer where you find this note, it will reach me by a sure hand.

"Yours sincerely,

"M. T."

I immediately sat down and dashed off the following:—

"DEAR MR. THOROLD,

"I am well, thank you, and not indisposed to see you, were it possible—indeed, I should be glad to do so, and thank you for your kind and welcome supply of books and papers; but there are urgent reasons why we must not meet. I hope you have quite recovered from the malaria.

"Yours sincerely,

"P. F."

Even if this fell into the Rani's hands it was harmless. One could not be too prudent. I folded this carefully, addressed and sealed the envelope, and left it on the table exactly where my note had lain. Then I went for a stroll in the ladies' garden, and when I returned in an hour's time the letter had disappeared.

The favourite expedition of the two little Ranis was to drive out to the old Fort of the Four Winds in order to collect wild grasses, peacocks' feathers, and porcupines' quills, and I reserved this much-prized indulgence as a special reward for industry and good behaviour. The fort lay about eleven miles beyond the city walls. To reach it we drove through many primeval villages, with their clusters of palms, tamarind, and cocoa-nut trees. There were generally a score of dwellings—some thatched, some tiled—grouped round a temple and a tank; then a wide stretch of flat, cultivated land; a tank or lake bordered with rushes, and covered with pink lotus and water-fowl; then again a village or a grove of many-stemmed banyans.

At length we came in sight of the grim old Fort and Palace of the Four Winds. It crowned a steep ridge, its ramparts extended along the hill-top for nearly a mile, sheer walls frowned on the plains below; but within were vaulted gates, temples, balconies, ruinous courts, elephant-stables, bathing-tanks, now choked with cactus, and the whole space in the interior given over to high pampas grass, thorn-bushes, and well-grown trees, flocks of goats, blue pigeons, and peacocks.

We left the carriages at the foot of the hill, and climbed up the steep path and under the great echoing gateway into the courtyard. I had been here many times, and this deserted spot, dignified in its desolation, rearing its silent walls above an empty scene, where once crowds of rich and poor and great and small had assembled, had a curious attraction for me. This forgotten palace still resisted the hand of Time, though its courts were covered with high grass, and its pavilions were the haunts of the wild boar.

The masonry was solid as ever. Hundreds of years it had stood against storm and sun, and hundreds of years after I was dead this forlorn palace would be probably as it was now, but for a denser growth of pampas grass and cactus, and a larger population of pig and peacock.

> "As the years were before we began,
> Shall the years be when we are no more,
> And between them, the years of a man
> Are as waves the wind drives to the shore."

I was sitting on the low ramparts turning over these lines in my mind. Apparently the waves made no impression on the grey walls around me. The little Ranis had

departed, under the care of a servant, on their never-failing quest for treasure and peacocks' feathers. As I sat gazing down abstractedly on the far-spreading prospect, I observed three men on horseback riding up the steep approach to the great gate. They were not natives. As they came closer, and clattered from underneath the arch of the entrance, I recognized that one was Mr. Thorold, and he evidently saw me. The court carriages would have prepared him for this meeting. The three men tied up their horses, and advanced to my seat in an embrasure, where once some ancient gun had overawed the country.

"Well met, Miss Ferrars!" called out the leader. "I thought no one ever visited this part of the world but myself."

"I have been here often," I answered; "at least half-a-dozen times."

"May I introduce Dr. Fleming, our Residency surgeon?" Here a stout man of about fifty, with a pleasant face, took off his hat. "And Mr. Bellairs, my assistant," as a pale-looking youth in spectacles did the same. "I have personally conducted Dr. Fleming," continued Mr. Thorold. "He is such an ardent partisan of the Madras Presidency, that I thought he ought to see something that really may justify his rapture in some small degree."

"Oh, yes!" cried Dr. Fleming, with a merry twinkle in his little brown eyes. "There you go sneering at the poor old benighted Presidency. The enlightened Presidency, I call it, and at least the *Indian* part of India. Give me Madras cooks and servants, Madras hills, Madras antiquities, Madras manners, Madras institutions."

"Please note, Miss Ferrars, how he places the cook in the forefront of his argument," said Mr. Thorold.

"Well, and is he not a most important factor in the whole daily routine? What can beat a real Madras cook?"

"Or the real Madras climate?" sneered Mr. Thorold.

"Oh, you North-West people are so vain of your cold weather!" retorted Dr. Fleming. "I suppose you have never been up there, have you, Miss Ferrars?"—addressing me.

"Oh, yes," I replied.

"And what is your impression? At any rate, you cannot deny that you have to carry your own bedding about with you."

"I had not time to notice much," I confessed, "for I was only there for three days."

Dr. Fleming opened his eyes in frank surprise, and the pale young man said suddenly—

"How do you like Royapetta?"

"I like it pretty well. And you?"

"Enormously!" was his amazing answer.

"He does," testified Mr. Thorold. "He is learned in archæology; he is a fanatic about our Dravidian buildings. These"—waving his hand—"are his happy hunting-grounds. I suppose you are here with the little Ranis?"

"Yes; these are also their happy hunting-grounds," I replied. "Peacocks' feathers, porcupines' quills, and buried treasure. I hope you have quite recovered from the malaria?"

"Thank you, yes; that trip to the hills was a most agreeable prescription—set me up at once."

"So much for the Neilgherry air!" boasted Dr. Fleming. "There is nothing to approach it in your Himalayas, where people are carried about in packing-cases. It was

a nasty attack, that," he remarked; "a type of malaria I have never met with previously."

"Something peculiar to Royapetta, I suppose?" suggested his patient. "What a sunset!" he exclaimed. "Look!" And we all turned towards the flaming west.

The distant line of hills were dark purple against a vivid orange sky, which was streaked across with bars of the most wonderful rose colour; this same rose colour blended into orange, tinted the entire scene.

"Everything *couleur de rose*," said Mr. Thorold. "I trust it is a happy omen."

"The sunset reminds me that we have not yet inspected the palace, and there is an immensity to see," said Mr. Bellairs.

"All right, Dick; you will show the doctor round," said Mr. Thorold, "and Miss Ferrars and I will sit here and talk shop."

As Mr. Bellairs scrambled down, and hurried away with the civil surgeon labouring in his wake, my companion turned to me, and said quickly—

"I am most fortunate in meeting you here. Now tell me at once why I may not see you in the palace?"

"Because the Rani Sundaram disapproves," was my prompt reply. "She does not trust me; she believes that I am your spy."

"Just like her Highness, the Queen of Spies."

"I had a terrible scene with her."

"I've had many terrible scenes with her through the purdah."

"Ah, but then you don't see her eyes."

"And what was the subject of the terrible scene?"

"It was about you; and if there is to be any peace, I

must not see you or write to you in future. The palace walls are full of ears and eyes. She witnessed our meeting in the audience hall, she saw me give you two letters, she heard 'bad' talk respecting herself."

"The devil she did! I beg your pardon, Miss Ferrars; but how could she possibly do all that, unless she really is a witch?"

"There are inner galleries high up, where the palace women watch state ceremonies. She must have been there."

"She hates me like poison, I'm aware; but I don't care. I'm making headway, paying off mortgages, lending money for public improvements, administering justice, and carrying out reforms. The state has been water-logged with debt, the taxes were awful, amounting to more than half their earnings, and drawn from the very lifeblood of the people. The Rani Sundaram does not care how many die of starvation. Her cry is 'Spend!' and her ambition and extravagance are as boundless as the sky."

"Is it true that there are to be great marriage ceremonies next month?"

"Yes; the first moon they will begin. We shall meet at that Tamasha, at any rate."

"Perhaps," I answered dubiously.

"There will be no perhaps. I shall take care of that. What do you think of my two companions?"

"That you are lucky to have them."

"Yes, I score there. Fleming is a real good sort, full of spirits, and clever. And young Bellairs is as enthusiastic and as learned as a don. He is mad about the antiquities of Southern India, and it keeps him occupied and amused.—Oh, of course," in answer to my exclamation, "he has other work, and a good head on his

shoulders. I have a second secretary, who works at the revenue, and a capital civil engineer; but they preferred shooting snipe to sight-seeing."

"Talking of sight-seeing," I said, "when the little Ranis return, what a tale for their grandmother! They will find us together."

"Undoubtedly they will," he answered. "We are free people; and if I may not speak to my countrywoman, I should be indeed a poor creature. Imagine if I were to turn tail and gallop off lest these children see—and here they come—me speaking to you, their governess!" and he laughed; but I did not echo his mirth, and he added more gravely, "I believe the fear of the Rani oppresses you; your secluded life has affected your courage, and no wonder. I promise you that, as far as I can help, your bonds shall be loosened."

The two little girls came running up, their silk trousers covered with burs, their arms full of feathers, and shrieking as they approached a marvellous tale of how they had seen a wild boar in a thicket. After they had enjoyed a little bashful chatter with Mr. Thorold, he accompanied us all three down to where the carriages were in waiting. When the children, their spoils, and myself were carefully packed into the landau, he took leave of us, and we proceeded homewards under the silver moonlight at our ordinary palace pace, a gallop.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"TWO FACES IN THE MIRROR"

THERE were several ways of reaching the gardens from the women's quarters, and as a rule I preferred to pass through the state apartments, for, though a much longer route, it avoided a labyrinth of endless black passages of unwholesome atmosphere and scores of inquisitive eyes. As I walked across the durbar hall one afternoon I halted for a moment to survey myself in a long glass, and I must honestly confess that I was somewhat partial to this particular mirror because it was so flattering. As I gazed at my reflection with rather subdued complacency, another face suddenly loomed upon the surface, and my heart gave a plunge like some frightened animal when I recognized the refined olive features of Ibrahim. I turned round sharply. No, it was no delusion, for there he stood, Ibrahim no longer the Persian gentleman in correct English dress, but Ibrahim the frequenter of courts, wearing a dark-blue frock coat, with an elaborate belt and a most becoming crimson fez.

"Ah, you are surprised!" he said, with the most complete *sang froid* and in a low and friendly voice. "I knew that I must see you some day. I have often looked for you. Are you quite well?"

"Yes, thank you," I replied formally.

"And how does the gilded cage suit Miss Ferrars?" he inquired with significance.

I parried this question by another, and said, "How did you get into the palace?"

"Oh, I am no stranger to the Rani Sundaram or to Durigodana, her brother. We are very good friends. I often do business with them. I am here about the wedding jewels; at present I stay in the city."

His expression and manner was so suave and polite, that I began to hope that he had forgotten not our last merry meeting, but our rather stormy parting. He was so clever, that he read my expression as if it were print.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "Madras is one place, Royapetta is another, and I too am different. Will Miss Ferrars overlook my madness, accord me her gracious pardon, and be friends?"

I could not afford to decline this olive branch, especially in a place where my friends were few, and I dared not venture to add to my enemies, so I said—

"Yes, Mr. Ibrahim, I am perfectly ready to let bygones be bygones."

"Permit me but one word; it is this, that I shall never, never change. It is still, and will ever be, 'the desire of the moth for the star,' but I will say no more;" and he bowed profoundly.

"I suppose the wedding jewels are splendid?" I began awkwardly, as I turned to move towards the outer court and garden.

"Truly the most magnificent in Asia, if they will but buy. Unhappily, there is a doubt. I have for sale the well-known Jasra pearls. They are mentioned in the songs

and histories of more than one dynasty, they are as ancient as Solomon, the size of thrushes' eggs, flawless and matchless. To possess them will place the family in a position of great distinction."

"And yet they will not purchase!" I exclaimed.

"They haggle at the price, or rather your friend, the political agent, has set his face against the outlay; but the wealth of this family is fabulous—it is like the caves in Aladdin."

"Yes, but only for show. The treasure and gold in the Toshakhana is never touched."

"I know," he interrupted with impatience; "but the land is fertile; there have been no bad seasons; the money will come from the revenues. Bunsi Lall and the soucars will lend, and I think the Rani will buy, though it is a big price—twenty lakhs of rupees."

"One hundred and fifty thousand pounds!"

"Yes, for forty pearls. And of course a little money will stick to people's fingers; but pearls are scarce and fashionable. In ten years' time they will be worth still more. A Russian princess owns a pearl worth sixteen thousand pounds."

"Twenty lakhs for what would go in my hand—for just bits of an oyster!"

"They are worth a ransom. Come, I will show them to you; all women like pearls." And he put his hand into the breast of his coat and drew out a long, elaborately chased silver box. This he opened with reverential fingers, and within, on blue velvet, lay the Jasra pearls. They were immense, exquisite, and flawless. As I gazed he suddenly took them up and twisted them round my wrist.

"There!" he exclaimed, "now you can say that you have worn the Jasra pearls, and well you would become them! I wish I could give them to you."

"Thank you," I replied nervously, and removing them as I spoke. "I should be afraid to own them. Pearls are unlucky; they say they bring tears—see, forty tears."

"Yes, many women have wept to possess these, and they have been offered far and near, but the price is too big."

"Are they yours?" I asked indifferently.

"Oh, no. I only sell on good commission—that is my trade. The Rani Sundaram is very keen; she means business. She will work the purchase somehow. She is a great woman."

"Have you seen the Rosarios lately?" I inquired.

"No. Why should I see them *now?*" he demanded with emphasis.

I dare not further pursue the question. I was most anxious to meet Ibrahim, solely on the footing of an acquaintance.

"I wonder you remain at the palace," he said. "You have been here four months."

"Why do you wonder?" I asked, turning slowly towards the court, which led into the garden. We were now walking to and fro.

"Because," he answered, looking stealthily around, and then suddenly dropping his voice to a mere whisper, "nothing is your own here—your time, your secrets, your soul—your life. You are a bold girl to stay."

"But why should I not stay?"

"Because you are so handsome," he answered readily. "Beauty is a fatal gift. You would be a pretty cat's-paw. The Rani uses strange tools."

"I have no fear that she will make use of *me*," I rejoined, as he paced the court beside me, with the pearls clasped in his hand. "No one dare touch a hair of my head. I am a British subject, and under the protection of the raj."

"Oh, yes, you are a British subject, I admit; but British subjects die of cholera, or fever, or disappear!"

"There is no cholera in the city now."

"No, but there are poisons; the cholera germ is easily introduced in food, snake-bites are simulated by a prick when the snake is a human being. I am well versed in native drugs; they interest me. I study them and their antidotes. I am an herbalist."

"Well, no one would have any interest in poisoning me," I asserted.

"That is true. You stand in no one's path; if you did, I would not value your life here at one halli sicca rupee."

"You are only saying this to frighten me, Mr. Ibrahim."

"I am only saying it to warn you," he retorted. "Do I not know native life? See, I walk in the centre of the court, aloof from ears. The Rani is old and cunning. She is also cruel and pitiless. She cares not how she gains her ends; she counts lives as you do pins. She raised this state from obscurity——"

"And steeped it in debt," I supplemented.

"You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs."

"And what of all the poor people who are owed money?"

"Yes, they are poor, frightfully poor. Some"—and he paused, and his eyes glittered—"have paid the debt of nature. Ah, this old palace could tell strange tales before you English took the Carnatic. There is a story of one great Rajah of Chingleput; he was invited into

the treasure-house alone, and they closed the doors, and left him in the dark to starve to death, and thus his debt was paid—that was long ago. It is long ago, too, since human sacrifices were offered in that little bare temple on the hill above the city—offered to Yama and Kali; hundreds of captives, and now and then a young girl. Hook-swinging is still in the land, so is trial by ordeal, and so is magic and the black art."

"You admit terrible things, Mr. Ibrahim; but I don't believe in magic or the black art, or anything of that kind."

"Ah, well, I tell you this for a truth—the fourth book of the Vedas has been *found*, but its existence is a profound secret. As to telling you horrors, I want to warn you; I want you to leave this palace. I believe there are schemes afoot; and also——" Here he came to an abrupt conclusion.

"Also?" I repeated eagerly.

"No," shaking his head, "I will not risk your anger. But only one little word. You do not often see the Political Agent?"

"I have seen him but twice."

"He is not, then, your friend; he is only——?"

At this critical moment I heard a spurred and booted heel upon the marble floor; some one was crossing the end of the court. It was Mr. Thorold, with a riding-whip in his hand, and a roll of papers under his arm. He glanced casually into the hall of audience, and then stood stock still. Yes, his eyes had not deceived him; he saw Ibrahim the jeweller and Miss Ferrars the governess sauntering slowly together, and engaged in earnest conversation. At first, when I caught his look of stern and haughty surprise, I had actually a thought of running away, and

leaving him and Ibrahim face to face. How tall and masterful and English he appeared as he strode towards us and took off his terai hat! How effeminate and oily Ibrahim seemed by contrast!

"This is a surprise," he said. "I have never seen you here before, Miss Ferrars."

"I was on my way to the garden, when I met Mr. Ibrahim." Here Mr. Ibrahim grinned spasmodically, and bowed profoundly. "I knew him at Mrs. Rosario's."

"Oh, and Ibrahim and I"—with a slight nod—"know one another too. I think we met in Bombay once."

There was a significance in his eyes and a shiftiness about Ibrahim that made me feel uncomfortable and *de trop*.

"I must really go," I said, "or I shall have no walk before the sun sets;" and with a hasty bow I hurried out of the durbar hall and left them together.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE JASRA PEARLS

It was the first week in March, and as the date fixed by the astrologers for the marriage of Rani Lucksmi approached I was conscious of a vague, inexplicable movement within the sleepy old palace, almost as if the torpid monster were sluggishly stirring in its sleep. The first token of life was a grand nautch held in the open courtyard. On this occasion the marble lattices of the women's galleries were packed with closely pressed faces, for it was a coveted sight to behold the celebrated temple girls from Tripura, whose dancing was held to have no equal in Southern India. The men-folk sat below in the open court, imperturbable and passive, though no doubt they enjoyed the drumming of the tom-toms, the fireworks, and the frantic strains of weird native music. For my part, I had my own solitary post of observation, from which I could see without being seen. I found the nautch excessively disappointing—a few shuffling steps to and fro, a simpering and posturing, a waving aloft of shapely bangled arms, all to the nasal twanging of a hideous accompaniment; but I appreciated the fireworks and the fire-balloons, and as I watched these latter sailing in fleets over the dark starry sky, I became aware that some

one was breathing over my shoulder. This is not an agreeable sensation. I turned about sharply, and discovered Begur the ubiquitous—the bat-like.

"Her Highness the Rani Sundaram would see thee in her apartments," she whispered, with an unabashed countenance.

"See me?" I repeated incredulously. "Why?"

"Nay, I know not—only that it is a matter of urgency."

"And when?"

"Now. I will lead thee hither, for the business is pressing."

It is needless to state that this summons was one which filled me with apprehension, yet I dared not decline it; and as I was compelled to go, I resolved to set out immediately and get it over. I therefore inclined my head and followed my black bat-like leader far, far away into a region of the palace entirely remote from the other apartments, into an unfamiliar quarter I had never dreamt of, down tunnel-like passages, and through courts whose corners were masked in darkness. At last a wadded curtain was flung aside, and I found myself in the Rani Sundaram's presence. The room was small and richly carpeted; there was a divan, many cushions, and a coffee-table, on which I descried a certain long silver case, a familiar object. The wizard was present, and a hideous bloated-looking man, with a horrible expression, whom I had never seen previously, and who stared at me in a manner that was insufferable. As I made my salaam to the Rani, she said—

"I would speak with the woman alone. Later ye shall have tidings."

The two men, thus peremptorily dismissed, salaamed and withdrew; then she turned to me, and said—

"Stand not there like a great tree, but sit. Listen, O yellow-haired woman. I have need of thy help."

"How can I serve the Rani Sundaram?" I faltered.

"Be silent, and thou shalt learn. Thou hast seen the Jasra pearls?"

I inclined my head, and sank down obediently among the cushions.

"They are matchless in India. To own them is to shine from end to end of the earth; to wear them at wedding or durbar is to make the hearts of mighty kings sick with rage and envy."

Yes, I could well believe it. Again I bowed my head.

"Our family, thanks to thy people, have become insignificant and impoverished. The wars of the Carnatic went against us. Now we are holding our heads up again. We have eleven guns, thanks to *me*. We have a guard of honour, we have married into good stock, our sons and daughters are sought for in marriage. All that remains to make us of importance is the possession of the Jasra pearls. These I obtain with thy help."

I sank back against the wall, and stared at her stupidly. I felt as if I were some poor rabbit fascinated by a rattlesnake. Yes, she would carry her point, mesmerize me with those eyes, and figuratively devour me.

"Mr. Thorold, the Political Agent, is a hard, stern man, unswerving as a spear. Thou knowest him, and can influence him. Thy power is immense; thou shalt put it to the test."

"I? How?"

"Truly it is a simple answer—because he loves thee."

"No, he does not," I boldly rejoined, sitting erect as I spoke.

"Peace! Am I an ape? an idiot? I know what I talk of. I see it in his countenance when he asks after thy welfare; and his colour changes when he is told thou art very sick. Oh, I am learned in the faces of men; it is my trade. No, no"—waving her withered hands—"it is for thee to listen, for me to speak. I ask Thorold Sahib to buy the pearls and reinstate our family. Other states spend far more than we do. One Rajah hath guns of solid gold and a carpet of jewels, and *I* ask but these pearls. If Thorold will consent, I am ready to die. But he is angry at the mere whisper, and talks foolishly of debts. What is debt to our dignity? No, he will not; he raves of ryots, taxes, bad rains, and no crops. I desire not to hear of rain or crops—I only have ears for the pearls. I have set my soul upon those pearls. I talk to him, and my brother Durigodana talketh to him; it is of no avail. I speak as to the deaf—the dead. The Rani Gindia and her brother are as weak as little children. They even say, "Wait, O mother, wait!'" —her voice rose to a scream—"and the Rajah of Ooloo will buy them, ay, even if he starves on cholum and dâl. There is not one hour to lose. Behold, thou shalt see Thorold, and shall urge him; it will be to thine advantage. Hearken. I give thee one lakh for marriage dower; there will be no more work; enjoy life and youth, and go forth and show thy beauty to the world, as is the custom of thy brazen women."

"I will accept no bribe," I answered; "it is folly to speak of this. And I have no influence whatever with Mr. Thorold. Do you think he would suffer *me* to touch the affairs of state? I am here to teach the children,—not to meddle in finance."

"Thou art here to obey my commands. Dost think I,

the Rani Sundaram, who hast ruled this great state for forty years, am to be baulked by one white-faced fool? And great, O fool! is thy power. Thou hast but to test it, so speak him softly, lay thy arms about his neck. What is he but a man—a man in love?—and love and wit dwell not together. A kiss from thee on the lips will save his life—and verily it is the price of the Jasra pearls. Moreover, unless I am a blind fish, he would *give* his life for one of thy kisses."

I tried desperately to speak, but this terrible woman still talked on relentlessly. "Thou must carry out my orders soon, for Ibrahim becomes impatient; he will take the pearls away. They have stirred every court in India, and he avers that he hath other customers. He is clever, that rat! Thou shalt see the Political Agent about this affair, and when he hath given his promise, the soucars are already in the palace, and the pearls will be ours." And for a moment a look of actual rapture appeared upon that hawk-like face, and she fell into a muse in which she possibly discounted future triumphs.

"But if Mr. Thorold refuses now and always?" I interrupted in a husky voice, for my lips were dry and parched.

"Then"—and she turned and transfixed me with one piercing look—"his blood be on his own head—ay, and on thy hands. Thou mayest warn him. If it be yea, ten thousand pounds and thee; perchance it is nay"—a pause, and her eyes became like two ink-pools lit with a torch—"there be other political agents!"

I staggered up from among the cushions on the floor, and leant against the wall gasping for breath. So it was to be life or death—I read that much in those eyes. "Your

Highness," I stammered, "I refuse your—a—a—gift, and I—I have no power to make Mr. Thorold recall his word."

"He knows *me*," she rejoined. "Did he not say that he had crossed my path, that we should fight a battle? I have fought battles, and never have I been beaten. Did he not also say that I had claws—the old woman's claws are dangerous? Thou shalt see him ere long, Miss Sahib; tell him all that is in your heart—tell him of thy *fears*; above all, tell him that the old woman's claws—deal death. Now go!"

She clapped her hands, and Begur the spy entered without a sound, and conducted me with great stealth back to my apartments.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE GARDEN PAVILION

THERE was not much sleep for me that night. As I lay awake tossing from side to side, I seemed to hear a monotonous voice repeating like the tick of a clock: "The pearls or his life! The pearls or his life!" The close dark room, the strange sounds without, the horrible sentence that rang in my head, all effectually banished slumber; swarms of pestilent little thoughts, like imps, came and sat around upon my pillow, and goaded me to the verge of distraction. The Rani Sundaram would have her prize at all costs. What was the life of a white man in her eyes? Truly of no account! She had ways, means, and tools. The next agent who succeeded might be more pliable; where Thorold fell, another man would step into the breach, and possibly enter into treaties.

"She dare not," urged common sense. I was a fool, and she had said so, and for once had spoken the truth. The confinement and solitude were telling on my nerves and brain; my self-reliance was ebbing; I had no courage. I rose and began to pace the room in the early dawn. I bathed my burning head; then got out my Bible and opened it, hoping to discover there some text which might guide me through my present distress. My eyes

fell upon the two last verses of the 141st Psalm, which are—"Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape."

How could *I* escape from this awful woman, who had summoned me to assist her, to gain her object, and to crush the miserable tax-payers? If I failed—as I would fail—if I would not stir one finger, or speak one word, what would be my fate? Cholera, or fever, or madness?

I cannot imagine how I got through my work that day. The reading and writing, and talking to my little pupils, were a sore ordeal. His Highness the Rajah Kodappa was unusually restless and tiresome. Then came the piano and guitar lessons, and the two sisters, though clever enough with their fingers, had not been gifted with any ear. It was the torture of the rack to my highly strung nerves, and once or twice I felt inclined to shriek aloud and beat my head against the wall—native fashion.

At last it was all over, and the unconscious executioners trooped away. In the cool of the afternoon, I made my escape into the great garden. There were two adjoining, one solely reserved for the ladies of the palace; the outer one—into which they rarely ventured—was that in which I now took refuge. I have already described its white marble walks and thickets of flowering trees, its blaze of roses, crotons, jasmine, and pomegranates; butterflies, gold and purple, white and scarlet, flitted about like flying flowers; blue pigeons and green parrots flashed through the trees. It was undeniably gorgeous and

tropical; but this delightful retreat had one grave drawback. Every part of it was overlooked by some portion of the palace, and the palace was all eyes.

I made my way to a splendid white pavilion and a miracle of fretwork and tracery, open at the four sides. A faint evening breeze was blowing from the hills above the city, and the stately palms were clashing their sword-like leaves, and the warm soft air was scented with the waxen flowers of the cork tree, as I sat down and leant my head upon the cool marble. I believe I was on the point of dropping off to sleep; my brain was worn out with thinking and searching desperately for some clue to the tangle; but I was not so drowsy as to fail to catch the sound of an approaching step. I sat up, and confronted Mr. Thorold. *She* had sent him.

"Good afternoon," he said, entering the pavilion. "I am told," he added, with a gay smile, "that you want to speak to me on urgent private affairs. Is the Government of the Regency to receive a month's warning? I say"—and his voice suddenly changed—"what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I am not ill—I am never ill," I replied; "and I did not send for you. But I am glad you came, for I am in a great difficulty."

"Out of which I can assist you, I hope."

"No, I am afraid not."

"What is it all about?" he demanded.

"About you, and the pearls—the Jasra pearls."

"But, my dear Miss Ferrars"—he paused, and then went on—"how came you to be mixed up in the palace politics? The Rani Sundaram is crazy to have them for the wedding; I have absolutely and formally refused to

sanction their purchase, and as far as the outlay of the revenues are concerned, I am thankful to say my word is law;" and as he spoke he came and sat upon the balcony at a corner facing me. He looked light-hearted and handsome in a cool white suit, and had evidently entirely recovered from the malaria.

"How have you been drawn into the battle over the pearls?" he repeated.

"I will tell you. Last evening the Rani sent for me to her own apartment. She frightened me; she is like an evil spirit. I felt as if her eyes scorched me."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of her eyes or her tongue."

"No? and you have never seen her eyes. Nevertheless she told me to warn you that her claws are dangerous; you know, she overheard us when we talked of her as the *cat*."

"A cat with nine lives, too. What did she want from you?"

"The pearls—the Jasra pearls."

He broke into a laugh. "Oh, is that all?"

"Stop," I said impatiently; "you would not laugh if you had heard her. She is set upon them; she would give her soul for them."

"Not much of a bargain. Has she a soul?"

"Please let me speak," I cried, and I looked about anxiously. No, there was no one within earshot.

He was leaning forward with his head resting on his hand, and he looked at me intently as he said, "This is becoming interesting. Go on."

"The Rani believes that I have influence with you; of course I know that that is nonsense."

"No; it is perfectly true," he gravely assented. And

the change from jest to earnest was so remarkable that I felt my face burn as I continued—

"And she commanded me to urge you to buy the pearls. She says that the dynasty is slowly recovering from the Carnatic wars; guns, honours, all replaced, thanks to her exertions; it only wants the Jasra pearls to restore all its lost prestige. It is the chance of centuries; if you wrest it from her, you shall pay a price. She is determined to have them. Ibrahim is now hanging about the palace awaiting her answer—and yours."

Mr. Thorold no longer laughed. He sat erect, and stared at me fixedly.

"And what has she promised you, if you cajole me and gain me over?" was his startling question.

"Ten thousand pounds."

"And of course you laughed in her face?"

"No," I answered significantly; "*I* am far from laughing. I trembled from head to foot."

"Why? I don't understand. What have you to fear?" he asked.

"Ibrahim has told me that the Rani Sundaram is capable of getting rid of any one who stands in her way as you do. She knows the most subtle poisons; you will die quite naturally of fever or cholera, and not a soul will suspect. Her methods never fail. She has silenced many creditors in this fashion; many enemies in the palace have quietly disappeared, and no questions asked."

"If you or I disappear, questions will be asked that must be answered"—with sharp decision.

"All the world fears her."

"And I do not," said my listener, suddenly jumping to his feet. "Though I am aware that her life has been

one long drama of triumphant wickedness, she shall never have the pearls—not even over my dead body! Ibrahim is a rascal, an unmitigated low scoundrel. He is no more a Persian than I am. He is half Portuguese, half Cingalese, hence his taste for precious stones. He goes about from zenana to zenana, palming off jewelry on foolish women, devouring the revenues of impoverished states, spending his gains on his own sordid luxuries. I believe, though I believe nothing else about him, that he *was* partly educated in England, and was kicked out of the country. He is a mongrel, a crafty impostor, rich, clever, unscrupulous, and base. His English veneer, his handsome face, and his unbounded cheek have carried him far."

"Oh, so this is the truth about Ibrahim!" I exclaimed. "And the royal blood of Persia is all a fable?"

"Yes, and a feeble fable. I've had my eye on the gentleman for some time. He told you all that rigmarole about the Rani, in order to pave the way for this interview. The pair are working together; she wants the pearls, Ibrahim wishes to sell them. It is a splendid bandobast and nothing could be simpler—only for *me*. I am the lion in the path."

"You are indeed," I admitted gravely.

"I see that the Rani Sundaram has arranged this interview. Well, since you are her ambassadress, the answer to her question is no—no, now and always."

"Of course, I knew that it was the only answer. I said so, and she refused to believe me."

"Why, it is simply a matter of common honesty!" he declared. "This post is not much to my taste, but the Government have given this boy into my care; I am

bound to do my best for him. We civil servants of the state have our battles to fight as well as the soldiers of the empire, and I think we have always shown a stout front to corruption and bribery, be it never so tempting. I stand by my charge, this child; I shall guard him to my utmost—his well being, his state, and his miserable over-burdened people. It is my duty to relax the tax-collector's grip, to restore justice and prosperity, and nurse this wrecked country into something like solvency, until the time the Rajah takes the reins into his own hands; at the present moment I am ruler and I am king."

Yes, he looked it every inch, this tall square-shouldered Englishman, with his strong steadfast face and quiet pose of natural distinction. He took two or three rapid turns through the pavilion, and then resumed—

"The people have my promise, the promise of the British raj; and do you suppose that I will pawn its honour to gratify the ferocious vanity of an old Jezebel, and devastate a province to buy her a string of pearls?"

"I have never imagined it in my wildest moments," I answered. "But I firmly believe that, if you refuse her, she will do her best to poison you."

"All right, I'll risk it; but I'll die at my post. However, she would not dare to poison me; no, nor touch one hair of your head. She knows that the Sircar has a long arm, and I am aware that her schemes are immense, far-reaching, and merciless; still, I believe that I am a match for any barbarous old woman."

"I hope so with all my heart; but it is unlucky to boast."

"Am I boasting? No, I am merely making a statement. Does the Rani really suppose that for the strongest temptation she can offer me, I will lavish twenty lakhs of rupees, and the cost of awful suffering to man and beast—the cost of God knows how many lives?"

"She has offered you a threat," I said; "but where is the temptation? I cannot see it."

"Of course you are the last to realize it, but it is sufficiently plain to her and to me." I looked at him interrogatively. "The Rani Sundaram hoped that your warnings, your fears, your entreaties, and—may I presume to say?—your beauty, would move me."

"But she knows that I would not ask you to break your word," I stammered; "and it certainly never occurred to me that my personal appearance would have the smallest weight in the scales of justice."

"Such things have kicked the beam before now!" he said dryly.

"I am certain that you are doing what is right," I murmured tremulously—"that you could not act otherwise. I—I shall give her your answer; but I believe it will cost you your life." In spite of my utmost efforts to restrain them, two runaway tears escaped from my eyelashes and splashed upon my dress.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MR. THOROLD'S AMBITION

For a moment I felt paralyzed with shame. I would not look up, nor even venture to wipe away the evidence of my emotion, lest I should draw Mr. Thorold's attention to the tell-tale tears.

"Miss Ferrars," he said—his voice had altered; it was low but distinct, and vibrated strangely—"if I dared to suppose that my life was of the least value in your eyes, I should be the happiest man in India."

I remained motionless and nearly choked by the beating of my heart, my eyes riveted on the marble pavement.

"I have always been drawn towards you ever since I first saw you," he resumed, now coming nearer. "That evening, when your music lured me into Tizzie's drawing-room, and you came suddenly out of the shadows and stood with the light shining on your face, I wished to Heaven you had come out to marry *me*."

"Don't speak of that time, please," I interrupted hysterically.

"Well, then, I won't. I never ventured to speak of it before. You and I have been thrown together, not as other girls and men out here — in ballrooms, in

amateur theatricals, and picnic parties, but in the very din and stress of the battle of life—first in the plague camp, now among the intrigues of a native court. You have, I must be allowed to say, borne the brunt with a splendid courage; but now I want you to allow me to be your champion and to fight all your battles. It seems an inappropriate moment, in this palace garden, where hundreds of eyes are watching us, where the very air we breathe is tainted with ill-will, to ask you to be my wife. Give me the right to stand by you—not only here in this den of intrigue, but ever and always."

So the old Rani's eyes had not deceived her. He *was* my lover.

I leant forward and buried my face in my hands. Was he pleading with Tizzie's words in his ears? Had she told him about—the photograph? Did he know that I had come to India solely to be his wife? But he was speaking again.

"This court of Royapetta is no place for you. Unfortunately, I see that too late, and *I* am responsible for your being here; and I now humbly confess that I could not resist one temptation—the temptation of having you near me. The post was vacant; you were fitted to fill it. I thought you would be happy; but I never reckoned on the old Rani and her schemes." After a moment's pause he added, "I have said 'No' to your question; will you say 'Yes' to mine? Won't you even look at me, or speak to me?"

Yes, I could no longer sit there like a dumb, bewildered fool. I raised my head. I slipped down from my seat and faced him.

"This," I said below my breath, "is pity."

"I swear it is not!" he exclaimed impetuously; "you are far too independent to suffer pity to approach you. It is the other thing to which pity is akin. I am afraid you think me hard and ambitious, and I remember how cruelly you used to snub me at Yellagode. Yet for the last year my sole hope and ambition has been to marry Pamela Ferrars. If I do not succeed, life will have nothing left for me. I lost trace of you for a while, in spite of my anxious endeavours to find you, and when I caught sight of you on the Madras beach, I said to myself, 'This is not luck; it is fate.' It was almost as if fate had intended you for me, instead of Watty."

I met his eyes, and in their depths there was a question and an appeal.

"Then—then," I stammered, "*what* did Mrs. Hassall tell you?"

"That he had sent my photograph to you, and of course there *is* a likeness. I attributed little to that; it was the letters which beguiled you. I would have come forward on the spot, but I dared not venture to speak; you stood armed behind your rampart of pride. I would not have spoken now, but circumstances have rushed me; the fact of these pearls being in the market has upset my plans. I'm afraid I have spoken too soon, but those two blessed tears unlocked my lips. Won't you speak, or may I take silence for consent?"

"You may," I faltered, "though you are the very last man in the whole world I intended to marry. You must remember that my relations disapprove of me, and so do yours——"

"Not now," he interrupted quickly.

"That I am poor——"

"And proud?" he added, with a laugh. "Yes."

"I am dull, and very old for my age."

"You are young, and beautiful, and brave, and good; if you were old and ugly, you are Pamela, and that is enough for me." As he spoke he took my hands tightly in his, and said, "I would kiss you if I dared—yes, under these hundreds of watching eyes."

I thought of the Rani's instructions, and became scarlet.

"But I beg you will not dare," I said, trying to release my hands. "And surely this is no time to talk of love?"

"It is at least a time to talk of promises and pledges. Look here, Pamela"—and as he spoke he unfastened a thin little wedding-ring from his watch-chain. "This belonged to my mother; I took it from her dead hand, and I now place it on the hand of my wife that is to be, as a token between us. Why are you so silent?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know," I responded. "I am full of terrible presentiments and fears. There is, as you say, ill will in the air."

"Yes; and, anyway, the air of the palace is awful—as thick as glue. Never mind; you shall soon be free, now you are bound to *me*."

"If it was only the Rani Gindia, and the children," I protested.

"She is a trump," he interrupted, "but she is powerless. The other, who arranged this meeting, who will turn it into a scandal to suit her own ends, who is probably watching us as we stand here, is the woman from whose claws I shall deliver you. I will see you to-morrow, and I will write to you to-night."

"There is no use in writing, and I am sure I shall not be allowed to see you for weeks."

"Oh, won't you? Leave it all to *me*. You are not on in this scene; I shall get the better of the Rani Sundaram, and carry you off. Mrs. Dalrymple is up in the hills at Coonoor. She is alone, as Dalrymple cannot get first leave, and she would jump at the chance of having you with her; until then, until I can get you away, the days will seem years. Won't you think of me sometimes, Pamela?"

"I will think of you always, and I will pray for you."

"Say something; you have hardly opened your lips."

"I say, God keep you."

"And I say——"

"Miss Sahib," and a voice seemed to spring out of the earth, and Begur the soft-footed stood at the steps, "her Highness the Rani Sundaram hath sent me to fetch thee. There is to be no delay;" and she beckoned to me, and then seized hold of my dress excitedly and pulled it hard.

"*Eh bien, c'est pour le dernier fois*," said Mr. Thorold. "*Je vous reverrai demain. Au revoir, ma bien aimée.*"

He walked with me as far as the open court, when he released my hand with visible reluctance. I believe he would have detained me for hours, but that Begur hurried me away towards the women's quarters, saying as she fled before me, down and up the winding passages, "Wurria, wurria, wurria"—the Tamil for hurry, hurry, hurry—"wurria, wurria, wurria!"

In a short time I found myself again in the presence of the old Rani. My heart palpitated violently, and with good reason.

"So the talk is ended," she said, raising her burning eyes to mine. "In half an hour thou hast persuaded him. I saw him arguing; I saw thee urging"—she had a pair of opera glasses beside her. "What are the tidings? The soucars are in the outer court; the pearls are *here*."

Yes, there was the case still on a low stand at her elbow. My lips felt dry, my tongue as if it were a withered leaf, but I managed to bring out four words.

"The answer is 'No.'"

"No!" she screamed, her jaws working convulsively; her lips were drawn back from her sharp blackened teeth.

"No," I repeated, resolutely, "now and always."

Suddenly the Rani Sundaram half rose—her face seemed to have withered up and contracted into two flaming eyes—and flung with all her force a jewelled dagger; it whizzed by my ear, almost grazing my neck, and the curved bright blade buried itself deep in the woodwork beside me. I did not wait for any apology or explanation, but tore aside the purdah and fled.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BAZAAR ACCOUNT

Day after day crawled by, and yet there was no sign from Max, no summons from the Rani Sundaram. The whole affair had passed, and left no more trace than if it had been a dream. I still went through my common round and daily task, as mechanically as a horse in a mill. I laboured conscientiously at scales and exercises; I expounded "reading without tears" to the little Rajah, though tears were on the verge of my own lashes; and still the Rani Gindia summoned me to her presence daily. She was always kind, more than kind—affectionate; but I could see that she too had her own troubles, and was depressed and anxious under the weight of some heavy care, and she looked to *me* to play the part of David to her Saul, to joke, to tell stories, to sing to the guitar, and to make merry. Oh, what a ghastly performance it was! I wonder if she ever noticed how forced were my smiles, how flat my jests, how weak and tremulous my voice? My heart ached with suspense, the worst kind of suspense—that of the patience which is isolated and powerless; the tension was almost unbearable. All this time the preparations for the marriage went on apace. Many

strange faces came and went. Hawkers, soothsayers, minstrels, ballad-mongers, thronged the outer courts. Once, as I passed through the hall of audience on my way to the gardens, I encountered Ibrahim, who appeared well pleased at the meeting, and shook me cordially by the hand. His hand was always clammy.

"So you are still here," I said, with an effort to be civil.

"Oh, yes," and he smiled with significance, "I am still here."

"And what about the pearls?" I asked tremulously.

"Oh, I think it will be all right. The Rani Sundaram cannot bring herself to let them go; she generally has her own way, and——"

"And?" I repeated persuasively. I must know the worst.

"She is at present keeping them,"—he paused and again smiled significantly; his narrow eyes gleamed—"on approval."

"Oh, is she?" I stammered, and I passed on quickly, but my knees felt as if they would give way under me long before I reached the white pavilion.

The many days since I had seen Max, his total silence, the Rani's masterly inactivity—what did it all point to? To coming clouds. I felt certain that the horizon was black and threatening, and that the present pause was but the calm before the storm.

When I re-entered my sitting-room that same evening, it was seven o'clock, and I discovered Moonasawmy waiting with his long narrow bazaar-book in his hand, prepared to render up the day's accounts. The time was rather unusual, but after all it was but a matter of a few

minutes; so I sat down, dipped pen in ink, languidly drew the book towards me, and signed for him to begin.

"This account not ready this morning," he said, "now I giving Miss Sahib."

I nodded to him to proceed.

"Six ye eggs, one anna." Then in a whisper, "*The old spy done gone to the city;*" aloud, "One cocoa-nut, one pice;" whisper, "*Punkah coolie is asleep.*—One seer of karfee, one rupee;" whisper, "*I have plenty big news to tell the Miss Sahib;*" aloud, "One currie chicken, four annas;" whisper, "*Thorold Sahib soon die;*" aloud, "Bunch of plantains."

"What?" I gasped—dashing the book together.

"Poison."

"Go on," I stammered in a low voice; "tell me all quickly."

"The old she-devil done give it," he muttered, "all for the Jesra pearls. Another man getting, not so clever, not going into statements and revenues and trouble-giving. Say 'Yes, yes,' Miss Sahib—say it loud; they may be above."

"Oh, yes, yes," I cried; "but tell me about Thorold Sahib"—and I shook his arm like a fury. "I don't care if they are in the gallery." I was going mad; solitude, anxiety, misery, want of sleep, were affecting me now.

"I done see him six days ago driving in city, looking very white. I asking my friend his chokra, he says me his master plenty sick, doctor never knowing what to do. Wasting, same like plant getting no water; no cure; in two days' time he will die. The coolie is asleep; if I found talking this talk, I too die, but the Miss Sahib was good once, and I not forgetting."

"You are sure it is poison?" I said.

"Yes, plenty sure. One week ago his cook giving notice, another very good man coming in his place. The old cook very poor man, now he is rich; he has been spending plenty money in bazaar—silk sarees and brass cooking-pots. Since the new cook come, Thorold Sahib spending his life. That new cook every one knowing; he is the servant of the Rani Sundaram, and she has given the order. Her orders are done"—and his voice sank to a whisper that thrilled me—"for never doing is *death*."

"Is there no cure?" I cried, in agony.

"Yea, if not too late. It is known to learned men, and to the magic wallahs—there is one cure."

"An antidote? Who could give it?" I demanded breathlessly.

"What man dare to interfere with the orders of the Rani? Every one too much fraiding. There is but one man in the city, plenty learned in poisons, and that is Ibrahim the Persian; he good medicine giving."

"Yes," I said. "Do you know where he lives?"

"Yea; he hath a hired house in the Pettah Bazaar."

"Then you must take me to him at once," I said impetuously. "Bring me a saree. I will blacken my face, and you shall pass me as your daughter or your wife. We will go out into the city by the servants' quarters, and get a jutka and gallop to the bazaar. There is not one second to be lost. Moonasawmy, listen to me. If you help me, I will make your fortune—you understand?"

"But if I losing my life, of what good fortune?"

"You shall not lose your life, unless I lose mine—or even then. Go now—now! *now!*" and I signed him to leave me.

I was seized with an energy and determination that filled my veins with a new life. First of all, I lowered the light in my bedroom, and stained my hands and arms with Indian ink; I took off my shoes, and put on soft slippers; I twisted my hair into the smallest compass. I had hardly made these arrangements before Moonasawmy returned with a tray laden with my supper, which he set down with a rattle, and flung a dark saree to me over the screen. I had learnt once, for amusement, how to invest myself in this graceful garment; it is quite an art. To a strange hand, twenty-six yards of narrow material without hook or string would have presented a hopeless puzzle; but in a few minutes I was ready. I did not know myself, and as I stepped out from behind the screen Moonasawmy started visibly. "It is well," he said. "Keep the saree drawn down, and missy limping as she walk. My daughter is a little lame. Missy never speaking, but follow me, and all may yet be well, but it is a plenty mad business." With noiseless feet, bowed head, and a slight limp, I hurried after Moonasawmy, whose steps were doubtless winged by fears; yet he bandied here and there a coarse jest, as we passed through the maze of human warrens, for the palace was packed with visitors. After about ten minutes' rapid walking, we came out of the dark stifling atmosphere, and stood under the cool stars. What a relief, from the tainted air of those long dark passages!

We passed the sentries—I limping painfully—and as soon as we were in the street, Moonasawmy hailed a jutka, and we scrambled in, and flew as fast as the tatoo could gallop towards the very heart of the city of Royapetta, which was as crowded and as busy as if it were early

morning, instead of nine o'clock at night. I never in my life beheld such a seething mass of human beings, or listened to such deafening noises, or smelt such strange odours; but I gave these experiences no attention, for all my thoughts were centred on my coming interview with Ibrahim. Would he be at home? Would he see me? Would he save Max Thorold's life?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PRICE OF THE ANTIDOTE

After many windings, maddening stoppages, and angry shoutings, we at last turned into a narrow lane lined with tall, blind, flat-roofed houses of the better class. Before the largest of these we came to an abrupt halt.

"It is here," said Moonasawmy, scrambling out and awkwardly assisting me to alight. A jutka is a precarious little covered box on two wheels, much affected by the natives in Madras, and drawn by one wiry pony. Our pony, I noticed, was a stout tat, and wore a conspicuous necklace of blue beads in order to avert the evil eye. Moonasawmy having commanded our driver to wait, we entered an open doorway, and then began to clamber up the very steepest stone stairs I ever encountered. When we had probably gone halfway, we came to a landing where there were several doors, and several lounging men. Everywhere there was a close oppressive atmosphere composed of rancid oil, incense, dried marigolds, and hot stale air. Moonasawmy whispered something to one of these; then, turning to me, pointed to more winding stone stairs, adding in a low voice, "He is on the roof." We climbed and climbed steadily, till at last my head came out, as it were, on the top of the house, a large flat place with a low parapet. It evidently looked

into a garden on one side, for the leaves of plantain, gold mohur trees, and palms peeped over the edge, and their flickering shadows danced upon the stone floor. Far away in the centre of the space there was a piece of carpet, and I saw a man lying at full length in a long chair, smoking, and reading by the light of a shaded lamp. As I came nearer, he started up, and then shouted angrily in Tamil, "Go!" and in a louder voice, as he caught sight of Moonasawmy, "Runga, why don't you keep these swine below? What are they doing here?"

"We are from the palace," announced Moonasawmy, with cringing humility, salaaming as he spoke.

"And she?"—pointing to me, with an insolent gesture.

"Is also from the palace," I proclaimed, letting the saree fall back.

"What! Miss Ferrars!" he exclaimed, in a shrill falsetto voice, now jumping to his feet. "How did you get out? This is a dangerous game. What has brought you?"

"Great trouble," I answered, signing to Moonasawmy to withdraw, which he did with obvious reluctance as far as the top of the stairs. "Mr. Thorold has been poisoned; I believe his very hours are numbered, unless you can save him. The English doctor does not know how to deal with native drugs."

"So that is why you have ventured!" he exclaimed. His quick eyes travelled over my saree, my stained hands and arms. "What do you wish *me* to do?"

"To give him an antidote, and save his life."

"His life is nothing to me," he replied, with a shrug. "We must all die."

"Yes; but not thus—before our time—by the will of

another," I argued in gasps. "Think of Mr. Thorold and his splendid schemes. How nobly he works for the poor, and defends the weak and oppressed!"

"I will take your word for it," interrupted Ibrahim, with an impatient gesture. "I am aware that he is honoured by the favour of Miss Ferrars, and all his achievements will be set forth in the press when he has passed away."

"But he will not die if you will give him the antidote," I urged distractedly.

"And what will you do if I grant your request?" inquired Ibrahim, considering me with his piercing eyes.

"I will go on my knees to you," I declared impetuously. "Surely you will use your power for the sake of humanity and—for the love of God?"

"No; nor for the love of—Thorold!" he rejoined, with a hateful laugh. "I never transact business in that way. Sentiment is well enough for women; but I, like all men, have my price."

So this wretch was measuring the tragedy by his personal interests. I was aware of a chill creeping fear, as I suddenly recalled the maxim, "*Rien ne se donne, tout se paye ici bas.*"

"What is it, then? Name it," I urged breathlessly.

"Yourself," he answered. "Of course you must know that—my price is Pamela Ferrars."

My surroundings suddenly swam and trembled; I felt sick and dizzy, and steadied myself by placing my hand on the low table. But he and I could both see how painfully it shook. I shuddered as I gazed at this man whom I loathed, but who declared that he loved *me*—this man whom Max had stigmatized as an impostor, a base,

unscrupulous mongrel. I thought of Max's moments, now ebbing fast, his upright, noble aims, his honourable stainless life. How he would defend the poor, uphold the weak, defeat the Rani, if he were spared. Well, I would give *my* life in exchange for his; it amounted to that. I must be crafty and cool now, and later—there were other poisons. No, there was no alternative; it was to be Max —or myself. I read thus much in Ibrahim's eyes.

"I agree," I said—and I marvelled at the sound of my own voice; it was that of a stranger—"since there is no other way."

"There is only one way—you will be my wife, if I save Thorold. Is it a bargain?"

I bowed my head without raising my eyes from the ground.

"I have heard of the case. Won't you sit down?"—pushing a seat towards me. I sank upon it, for I felt that I was unable to stand any longer.

"Mr. Thorold has unfortunately taken a deadly poison," he observed in a cool matter-of-fact voice. "The effect is enervating, intense lassitude, loss of sleep, of memory, of appetite—a wasting fever; and, worst of all, he is dying of starvation. Some one who has a spite against him has done this, no doubt, for he is a stern employer. I once knew a cook who administered a love-philtre to his master in order to gain his favour; but it killed him. These natives are too fond of tampering with poisons," he concluded airily.

"I don't want to hear of poisons—only of an antidote!" I cried, with sudden passion. "Give the antidote without delay; moments are priceless."

"Will you give me one kiss as a fee in advance?" he

asked, leaning towards me; and his eyes glittered greedily.

"No; you have had your terms," I answered fiercely. "And so you knew that he was dying?"

"Yes, I knew that he was ill. But surely you did not expect me to interfere to save my rival? I do not like him; I should be glad if he died. Only he will not die now, since you pay the price of his life. I too am paying a price; but I am always prepared to pay for a —jewel. I told you that I should reach you, proud, beautiful Pamela! Is my foot on your neck now, or not?"

"Yes," I confessed, almost in a whisper; "I am in the very dust."

"I shall lose ten thousand pounds," he resumed, "commission on the pearls, for Thorold will never submit to the purchase as long as he draws breath. I shall lose a customer and a good friend in the Rani Sundaram. She will be worse than a hungry tigress who has lost two cubs. *I* shall lose all this, but I shall have *you*." His eyes gloated over me, and a great vein like a piece of cord stood out in his forehead. "Yes, I shall have—you!"

He would have my dead body, as I had assured him.

"You will go at once?" I said impatiently. "You will start soon?"

"At once—in the guise of a philanthropist, profoundly grieved to hear of his strange and mysterious case. But the English doctor will not suffer me to prescribe, and yet I can administer the one little seed—the priceless little seed, known only to adepts in herbs."

Herbs!

"I can compound a draught that will save him, and snatch him out of the arms of death."

"If you will give me a sheet of paper, I will write to Dr. Fleming now," I said, "and you can take the note as your credentials."

"Very well;" and he clapped his hands loudly.

A servant shot up from the stairs, and received an order. He was quick; in a few moments I had writing-materials, and rapidly penned a wild-looking scrawl.

"DEAR DR. FLEMING,

"I have heard of Mr. Thorold's dangerous illness, and I send you this note by the hand of Mr. Ibrahim, who is a specialist in cases of severe malaria. I beg you, as a great favour, to allow him to see your patient.

"Yours truly,

"PAMELA FERRARS."

I noticed, when too late, that the paper bore Ibrahim's crest and monogram; but, after all, what did it matter? What did anything matter now, so long as Max escaped? This was not the first time the Rani had attempted to poison him; the other attack of malaria was undoubtedly the result of her experiment in "herbs."

"Have you any idea of the form of poison?" I asked sharply, as I handed over this note.

"Yes; I believe it is atropine. You merely smear a plate with one leaf of the plant, serve it to the subject, and the result is fatal. It is far more subtle than such clumsy devices as ground glass." He spoke with the contempt of an expert.

"How shall I know if he recovers?" I inquired.

"By the mourning in the palace," was the significant

reply. "The antidote never fails if prescribed in time. I shall come to claim my fee."

I shuddered involuntarily.

"And how am I to know that, when I have carried out my promise, you will keep yours?"

"I give you my word of honour."

"Bah! a woman's honour! No; you shall sign a paper, and give me his ring. Oh, yes, you were seen to receive it—he took it from his own chain; and I must have it and the written promise, or all is at an end—that is to say, his life."

"I am in your power, I see, and God help me!"

"Bah! I don't believe in God or gods."

"No, I am well aware of that."

He was scribbling rapidly as I spoke, and I observed Moonasawmy, who was seated with his head above the steps, making frantic signs to me that time was up, and I nodded to him to indicate that I would come.

"Now sign this," said my companion, suddenly; and he placed before me a sheet of paper on which was written, in a clear hand—

"*Private.* I, Pamela Ferrars, governess at the court of Royapetta, do solemnly promise, by all I hold sacred, to marry Nazar Ibrahim of Teherhan and the Imperial Hotel, London, within one month, on the understanding that he administers a medicine and saves the life of Maxwell Thorold, I.C.S., now dying."

I seized the pen, and dashed off, "By poison administered with the knowledge of many people, as well as Nazar Ibrahim." Then I signed my name, and handed it back to him.

"I say, I won't take this," he protested angrily.

"Very well; I sign no more. I am not utterly helpless," I said, with a stamp of my foot. "What do you say if I cry aloud on this very housetop, summon the police, rouse the city, and publish the crime all over India?"

"I say"—coolly erasing the debated sentence and folding up the paper—"that before you had called the police or roused the town you would be strangled and thrown down some well, unless"—with a hideous smile—"you prefer your dead body to be found *here*? You see, we are not quite civilized. Even now you are risking your life. Give me the ring, and go."

I handed it to him without a word.

"In a month from to-day we will be married. We will ask Thorold to the wedding. Come, I must start at once. As for you, my beautiful, brave Pamela, there is no time to lose;" and before I could prevent him, he snatched at my hand and, in spite of my struggles, covered it with impassioned kisses, then led me to the head of the stairs, where I once more became a veiled woman, and in less than five minutes Moonasawmy and I were in the jutka, and forcing our way towards the palace at the top of our tatoo's speed.

"It is all right, Missy," said Moonasawmy, as he held himself respectfully aloof in our rather straitened circumstances. "He has given orders for a carriage. Ibrahim is going; he never do things for nothing. Missy must be plenty rich?"

There was an interrogative note at the end of this sentence, but I ignored it completely.

"We shall get in all right," he continued, "for they are all mad over this marriage business and bobbery."

At last we reached the big gates, went through a postern past the drowsy sentries, and Moonasawmy, pushing me rudely before him, said, "'Tis my sister; she has come to see the tamasha," and I was admitted instantly and without remark. We met various other stealthy veiled figures creeping noiselessly along the passages. Oh, I was not the only female who had been in the city that night. I noticed Begur herself, luckily in good time, and stood within the cover of a black shadow as she glided past. I found that my punkah coolie was still asleep; I believe Moonasawmy had drugged her. He had followed me to the door of my room and whispered, "I have done good business; plenty trouble for Moonasawmy—and the payment?" Twice in one night did men speak to me of payment—but this man was worthy of his hire.

"Yes, I shall keep my word, Moonasawmy. Now go."

When I entered my own room, I tore off the saree, washed my hands and arms, then threw myself down on my bed, turned my face to the wall, and prayed for death —an easy natural death.

"However, I believe I soon fell fast asleep, utterly exhausted by the strain of my expedition and my agitating interview. The following morning I set to work as usual, with every nerve on edge, my sense of hearing pitched to its utmost capacity, awaiting news, signs, developments. But for five endless days there was no tidings from without; at last, late one afternoon, Begur stole in and laid a visiting-card before me—"Mr. Maxwell Thorold, I.C.S."

"He is in the little hall of pleasure, near the hall of audience," she announced, "and desires to see the Miss Sahib now."

I rose, and followed my leader immediately. I could have outrun her if I dared, so anxious was I to behold my visitor.

I found him in a little yellow sitting-room, furnished Europe fashion, which opened out of one of the state apartments. As I entered, he rose with a great effort, for he was evidently still fearfully weak. He was ghastly; he looked like the skeleton of a man—but a man animated by some bold and eager spirit.

"Oh, are you better?" I cried, with outstretched hands. "But why—you should not have ventured *yet*."

"I had to come; I would venture my life. I'd have died if they had prevented me. I wanted to see you about —this," and he drew his breath hard.

To my horror he displayed the ring, his pledge to me. Then he sat down, holding it out in a hand that shook visibly. I gazed at it and at him in speechless distress, and he looked steadily at me.

"Ibrahim boasted that you gave him this," he continued, in a weak, low voice; "but of course I know that he *stole* it."

"No," I answered; "I did give it to him." I intended to tell Max all, but my tongue was as a piece of parchment.

"And you"—here he seemed about to choke—"wrote that letter from Ibrahim's quarters, and sent it to Dr. Fleming by him, and it was not a forgery?"

"No," I whispered.

"Oh, my God, am I still off my head?" he cried, struggling half out of the chair; "I *must* be mad. Why, the scoundrel swore you had promised to marry him, and I had him thrown out of the Residency."

"Oh, it is all true," I answered, wringing my hands; "yet hear me."

But Maxwell Thorold could no longer hear. As I spoke, he gave a little stagger, lurched forward heavily, and fell with his head between his outstretched arms upon the table. And no, he never stirred. Had I saved his life by one means to take it in another? I remembered the death of Mrs. Evans, and I felt as if a sword had been sheathed in my heart. I laid my hand on his; it was limp and motionless. Then I rushed out into the durbar hall, and called distractedly.

People ran at my summons, and Dr. Fleming came hurrying in from where he had been waiting in the carriage. His pleasant face was not friendly to me now. As he attempted to restore Max to consciousness, he turned, and said to me roughly—

"We shall not require your assistance, Miss Ferrars. As soon as he comes to, I shall take him home. His visit here was suicidal. In the meanwhile, he had better not see you again."

This was the cruelest stroke of all. "He had better not see me again," and it was echoed in my own mind. I felt mad, desperate, out of myself. Without waiting for a summons, I went straight to my kind, good friend the Rani, and said abruptly—

"Your Highness, I implore you to give me permission to leave the palace for one month. I am in sore trouble. I desire to go to the hills, where I have a friend. Oh, Rani, if you think well of me, and that I have done well for your son, do help me in the name of your gods—and my God!" and I burst into tears.

"The Rani Sundaram is shut up in her own apartments,"

she replied; "she is sick—that means that she is terribly angry, and I, alas! am nobody, as you know. But nevertheless I will try."

"You are the Rajah's mother, the mother of my pupils. Help me to get out of the palace to-night," I pleaded. "I will come back in three weeks' time."

I must return to redeem my promise; but if I remained in the palace until then, I should certainly become a maniac. I had money, I had a letter from Mrs. Dalrymple, congratulating me on my engagement to the best of men, and begging me to join her as soon as possible. She sent a most enchanting description of her cottage, overhung with jasmin, her garden full of violets, carnations, roses, and orange trees; she ascribed the views, the exquisite hill climate with the properties of champagne. When I thought of that place where she was, it seemed like heaven;—and here was I, in the very pit itself.

My tears, my urgency, my eloquence, bore fruit. The little Rani took a bold step—she gave me leave, unknown to all but her brother. It was arranged that I was to depart at dawn for Bowenpillay Junction. I packed up one small box, I gave Moonasawmy what seemed riches to him, and, closely veiled, and escorted by Shumsha Lal himself, we galloped to the station in one of the state carriages, in time to catch the early morning connection with Jollapett and Mettapollum. For three weeks I was free!

CHAPTER XXXIX

A REFUGEE

BEAUTIFUL Coonoor, where it clings to the side of the blue hills, and peeps boldly down into deep but exquisite valleys, seemed to bring me new life. I breathed a different atmosphere in every sense of the word, as I stepped into the verandah of Rose Cottage and surveyed the great purple "Droog," the tree-ferns, the far-away blue plains. But when I first came up and staggered out of the tonga, I had administered an awful shock to my friend.

"The ghost of Pamela!" she cried. "What has happened to you?"—as she embraced me. "Is *this* the effect of being engaged to Max?"

"No; I am not engaged to him now."

"Nonsense!" she ejaculated. "You have begun early with your lovers' quarrels, and I suppose *I* am to mediate between you?"

"No, no," I answered hysterically; "it is past all that."

"Well, never mind; I won't bother you now, dear child. Come in at once. Give me your hat. The first thing is to have a good cup of Milgherry tea; the next

is to rest. You look as if you had not been in bed for a week."

As I sat in Mrs. Dalrymple's charming room opening into the verandah, and felt the cool air blowing up the ghaut, and saw her familiar knick-knacks and photos, and the dear dogs, and her still dearer self, I felt inclined to imagine that the whole of those last days at Royapetta, the whole of my stay at Royapetta, was a bad dream, or I had died down there, and this was heaven! My brain was in a strange, over-wrought condition; the pupils of my eyes had distended; my nerves were a thing of the past.

Twelve hours' sound, uninterrupted sleep did me much good. When I awoke and was dressed, I felt more like my former self; and as I sat out in that sweet garden, with no fear of eavesdroppers, I related the whole of my story to Mrs. Dalrymple bit by bit. As soon as I had stumbled to the end of it she stood up quickly, stooped, and kissed me.

"I suppose you think I've made a dreadful muddle of it again?" I said.

"I think you are not always wise, but I think you are a heroine, and you have a courage that is far beyond my reach. You have bearded the Rani in her den; you have saved the life of Max."

"Yes; and I am bound to marry Ibrahim, the half-caste Portuguese, who has all the worst vices of both races."

"Never; you shall never marry that wretch!" she said vehemently. "It was an extorted promise. Why, it is only your poor over-wrought brain that would cast a thought to such a horror."

"I have given my word of honour."

"And you must, shocking as it sounds, withdraw it.

Imagine such a thing as to marry a miscreant like Ibrahim! and, besides, you were engaged to Max. Did you say he showed Max his ring and boasted, and that Max despises and loathes you?"

"Yes, of course he does."

"I cannot imagine why you did not at once tell him the whole infamous tale, instead of standing before him, as it were, in the dock."

"Nor can I now; but I was so unprepared, that I felt in a haze of bewilderment—my tongue seemed paralyzed. Then he fainted, and Dr. Fleming drove me out of his sight."

"Poor Pamela! And before Max was ill he wrote me such a letter, telling me of his engagement—pages and pages about his Pamela, and promising to send her up to me on a long visit."

"And, you see, Pamela has come here of her own accord, to hide her head."

"Never mind, my dear Pam. You shall hold it high before long, and that I prophesy. Pray leave me to deal with your affairs."

I shook my head. What could she do? How untie the knot I had fastened with my own hands?

"By the way, I had a letter from that pretty half-caste girl, your friend Eulalie, anxiously asking if I knew anything about you. And I wrote to her, and told her you were going to be married to Mr. Thorold, and that I hoped in a very short time you would be with me."

"Poor Eulalie! she is so warm-hearted," I said. "I wrote to her, but of course she never got my letters. As for me, I have almost forgotten what a letter looks like."

"Well, you shall soon remedy that here, when we boast

of two posts a day. Now look at my pretty pair of Pegu ponies coming round. Are they are not sweet?" and she pointed to a low carriage drawn by two sturdy little bays. "Romeo and Juliet—they are so fond of one another, and so obedient. I am going to carry you off for a drive round the Figure of Eight, and perhaps as far as Bleak House."

I think that drive did me as much good as the long sleep: the lovely air, the constant meeting of happy-looking faces, the ring of merry English voices, the clatter of the ponies' hoofs, the high spirits of my companion, all combined, acted on me as a charm.

CHAPTER XL

LETTERS

"WHAT a fat one!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple, as the postman came up the steps and put a very plump letter into my hand. "You cannot say that you don't know the look of a letter *now*. And nothing for me but some patterns from Whiteway and Laidlaw, and the daily paper. Well, dear, I won't grudge your luck;" and as she spoke, she tore off the wrapping of the *Madras Mail*.

The envelope contained, not a letter, but letters from Crundall's Road—letters of congratulation, like a family coming to visit in a body, in the one conveyance. There were five: one from Mrs. Rosario, one from Gwendoline, Lola, and Eulalie; and, also enclosed, a letter from England, much fingered, and addressed to me in an utterly unknown hand. This I put aside whilst I read the Rosario budget, every line brimming with kindness, good will, and exultation. Eulalie's shall speak for all.

"DEAREST, DARLING, DUCKY, LOVEY PAMELA,

"I send this up to Coonoor to your friend, Mrs. Major Dalrymple, as I expect you will be with her now.

She has told me your grand news. Oh, my dear, I was so pleased that I danced about till my shoes came off! And you will say again that Eulalie has eyes in her head." I should think she had! "Mr. Thorold, so handsome, so wealthy, so well spoken of, and *so* clever. What a match, but not one bit too good for *our* Pamela. Oh, Pamela, you will be a great lady now, and drive in a beautiful victoria! Be sure you have a pair of arabs with long tails. How proud I do feel when I think of them! What a piece of luck that you always showed the cold shoulder to Ibrahim! He wanted to marry you, he told Mrs. Rosario, and he was *mad* when you went away to Royapetta; but who would look at Ibrahim in comparison with Mr. Thorold? And he is not received at Government House, he says, because there is a coolness between his family and the British Resident at Teheran. Anyhow, *you* go to everything now, and dine, and dance in the banqueting-hall. I shall creep in at the door and watch. You may be sure we have not been long in telling the news to our friends. I wish you had seen the faces of the Cardozos and the Josephses. And here is a joke! Frederick Augustus is now *very* sorry that he did not marry you. You must write me pages of your news, all about everything, and about your trousseau. I am getting my things, for Melville has been given an appointment in the Arsenal, one hundred rupees a month." It would not go far with Eulalie. "I am having a white satin, very long, with two bodices, and a blue going-away costume; but some of your dresses have trimmed and done up as good as new." So my trousseau would be a trousseau after all. "Mrs. Rosario has never got over your loss; it was nearly as bad as that of the Nellore

cow. She is dead. That *was* a blow! Poison, they said, in a meal cobb; but I don't believe in such nonsense as poison in these days. We have still the same old lot. A cousin of Mrs. Rosario's, Constantia de Castria, an ugly old maid, manages for her. She is not a patch on you. Gwendoline is to be married in August. That horrid Jocasta has actually got a beaux, one of the Cardozo boys. I do wish she were away out of No. 16. I send you a letter that came ages ago. Mrs. Rosario put it in the pocket of her green satin, which she never wears, and there it lay. It does not look as if it was up to much. Write soon, lovey, to your devoted

"EULALIE."

I opened the letter which was not supposed to be "up to much;" but at any rate 415 Grosvenor Square, London, W., was the address at the top of the page. The writing was scratchy, and inscribed with a sparse allowance of ink.

"DEAR PAMELA FERRARS,

"I don't know what you will think of *me*, but I have often thought of *you*. I had no time to write the morning I was scuffled off to the steamer; I was so pressed I did not know whether I was on my head or my heels. And then I lost your address—of course Miss Ferrars, Madras, would not find you. I was very much distressed and was afraid I had lost sight of you for ever; but to-day, when I was turning over my Indian purchases, I came upon a book. I remembered, in a moment, that I had written your address in it; and, sure enough, there it was, and I post this letter within the same hour. Do

write and let me hear your plans, and send me your photograph. I cannot tell you—I was always a bad hand at expressing myself—how your face recalled the past, 'the tender grace of a day that is dead:' it will never come back to me, but *you* might come back, if your pride will allow you, to an old woman. Always remember that you have a home with me. After all, I am your cousin, your blood relation, and on that ground alone I claim you. You will live with me here in the proper surroundings of a girl of your condition, instead of working for the sake of a few paltry rupees, and a paltry pride, in the purlieus of an Indian city. Think it over, Pamela, and believe me to be, dear,

"Your attached kinswoman,

"ELIZABETH TREGAR."

Not "up to much," and three months old! It was a kind, kind letter, and I would answer it at once; but it was too late to stretch out and take hold of her helping hand—now.

"I see you've had news," said Mrs. Dalrymple, as I folded it up. "I declare you have quite a colour, and I have a piece of news for you."

As she spoke she handed me the paper, and pointed to a paragraph—

"DEATH OF HER HIGHNESS THE RANI SUNDARAM OF ROYAPETTA.—We regret to announce that her Highness the Rani Sundaram, mother of the late Rajah, and grandmother of the present young Prince, passed away suddenly at the Palace of Royapetta, on the morning of Tuesday. She had reached an advanced age."

Could I believe my eyes? Then she was really ill, and

not angry, when she had remained shut up in her apartments?

"That will relieve the atmosphere, won't it?" exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple. "Do you suppose she can have died of grief, like Queen Mary, and that the word *pearls* was engraved on her heart?—or perhaps she had no heart?"

"No, she had none; and she looked so active, and so tough, that I should have expected her to live a century. I can hardly believe that she is dead. What an event!"

"Great events travel in company," remarked Mrs. Dalrymple, with an air of conviction.

"There will be yet another event this evening—it has already arrived at Mettapollum, and is coming up the Ghâut at express speed."

I stared interrogatively, and she uttered one syllable—"Max!"

"How did he know that I was here?" I asked, below my breath.

"By that most simple process—a telegram."

"Why is he coming?" I faltered.

"Another easy question. To see you."

"Oh, what is the good? However, he knows all by this time," I said, and my heart began to flutter fast, stirred by the conflicting emotions of hope and fear.

"Yes, this is a day of events for you," continued my companion. "Your budget of letters, the news of the death of the Rani, and the traveller *en route*."

"And there is something else, too," I said, "though it is not as important as the other. I have had a letter from Lady Elizabeth."

"What!"—throwing up her hands—"has she reappeared

on your horizon? This is too delightful. Give me that letter this moment."

I handed it over to my companion, who devoured it standing.

"Lady Elizabeth is a good old thing," she exclaimed, when she had come to the end of it. "I am rather sorry your father did not marry her; and there is no use in kicking against the pricks. You will have to be an heiress, after all, my love—you cannot help yourself. Now this"—waving the sheet of paper—"winds up the whole day's events with startling dramatic completeness! You really look quite cheered up; so much for three days of Coonoor, and *me*. If you like, you can gather some roses and heliotrope for the table, and, when you have brought in a good supply, you must run away and dress."

Yes; but what was the good of it all, I asked myself, as I put on a white gown, and fastened some roses in the bodice? Of what avail was Lady Elizabeth's letter, Eulalie's congratulations, Max's telegram? Why should I take pains with my hair, and deck myself with flowers, when all the time Ibrahim the jeweller sat awaiting me in the Palace Gate?

I remained for a long time in my own room, fighting with my hopes and fears; and that horrible old quotation kept thrusting itself into my mind, "Although he promise to his cost, he makes his promise good." I must make my promise—good.

And yet, why should I be bound by a mere half-sheet of note-paper to marry a man whom I abhorred? That sheet of note-paper—I shuddered as I thought of it—contained what was practically my sentence of death.

At last I went out into the drawing-room, and, to my great surprise, there sat Max talking to Mrs. Dalrymple. He rose and met me, took my hand in his and put it to his lips. Would he have done so, I wondered, if he knew who had kissed it last?

"You see I have had the start of you," boasted Mrs. Dalrymple; "he has been here for three whole minutes. He has got a room at the Glenview Hotel, and walked over; and now"—rising—"I will leave him to explain his visit." And with a smile and a nod she wandered away into the garden.

"In the first place, Pamela," he began, "before I explain, I must tell you I am aware"—and his voice became husky—"that I owe my life to you. It was always yours; but now it belongs to you doubly."

"Then—you know," I said breathlessly.

"I know that the pearls have proved you to be a priceless treasure. Since you fled from Royapetta everything has come to light: your terrible adventure in the city, the price you agreed to pay in exchange for my life. There never was such a desperate sacrifice of self since the days of Jephthah. And that awful afternoon when I came to the palace, maddened by the boasts of Ibrahim, and resolved to hear the whole truth from your own lips, even if the effort proved fatal—Pamela, *why* did you not speak? You nearly killed me!"

"I was so taken by surprise," I answered; "I was only clear on one point—that I would speak the truth. I meant to tell you all, when you fainted. Who told you?—who discovered the truth?"

"The Rani Sundaram herself. The day after you left Royapetta I was brought a letter from her. Here, you

shall see it." And he quickly unfolded and held out a thick sheet of emblazoned paper.

I read, whilst he looked over my shoulder, the following strange document, written in a straggling hand—

"*From the* RANI SUNDARAM *to the English Political Agent*, THOROLD.

"The Jasra pearls I desired so urgently have passed to the Rajah of Ooloo—ancient enemy of our house—may his name be accursed! Ibrahim, the pariah dog, hath played the traitor and fool. My heart is in ashes; my hours are numbered. I will not live to know that mine enemies laugh, and boast, and jeer; and lo this letter, written by a sure friend, cometh to thee from the hand of a dead woman. The English girl obtained the antidote from Ibrahim, by which thy life was saved, going by stealth into the city at night to seek him. In return for this favour he compelled her to promise, by writing, to become his wife; this promise she gave—thus much will love do. She vowed herself to succour thee—and save thy life; but there is none to stand between *me* and the life of Ibrahim.

"*From the* RANI SUNDARAM."

When I came to the end of this I raised my eyes, and looked at Maxwell. He returned my gaze with a steady glance.

"It is true what she wrote," he said in a low voice. "There was no one to save *him*."

"And is he dead?" I whispered inarticulately.

"Yes. He was found dying on the roof of his house; and he passed away yesterday. Among his effects Dr.

Fleming discovered your letter; he gave it to me—and here it is."

I reached out my hand, seized it, and tore it up in twenty pieces. This accomplished I broke down and wept.

And that is all.

* * * * * *

I had left England to become Mrs. Thorold, and Mrs. Thorold I now became. We were married in Coonoor Church; and it was, the papers declared, a very smart wedding, with a detachment of red-coats from Wellington, several of Maxwell's brother officials, and not a few pretty girls.

In response to my invitation (enclosing cheque) Mrs. Rosario and a goodly contingent from Crundall's Road appeared at the ceremony. The blinding brilliancy of their costumes almost extinguished the uniforms in their neighbourhood, and Eulalie's radiant and compelling beauty dimmed the brightness of our hill stars!

Major Dalrymple gladly undertook the part of a parent, and gave me "absolutely" to his oldest friend. Our presents were numerous and varied, some—for example, those despatched by the Rani Gindia—were costly; some, none the less valued, were not. Some were slightly embarrassing—for instance, Mrs. Rosario's three-months'-old calf!

Max took privilege leave to England, and, once there, we made our headquarters in London at 415, Grosvenor Square. Lady Elizabeth is charmed with Max. I am not sure that she does not like him better than she does me—she makes no secret of the fact that she greatly prefers men to her own sex;—and now that we are countenanced by her, I am received by all the great

Ferrars connection. My cousins, too, have condoned my shortcomings; and Mrs. Thorold—Watty's mother—actually invited us to spend three days at Beverly. I wonder what use she hoped to make of me on that occasion?

The Regency of Royapetta have been compelled to seek for a new governess, as the late governess has abandoned the palace for the Residency. Lady Elizabeth talks of coming out to see us and our surroundings, and I believe she will accomplish her intention. She has presented me with some beautiful diamonds, which she considered "imperatively necessary to my official position," and Max was anxious to endow me with a string of fine pearls; but these I implored him to spare me—they would only have reminded me of that other string of pearls, now the pride of the Ooloo Zenana,—so he gave me, instead, a splendid necklet, fit to flame in any Eastern "Tosha Khana," and inside the pendant is inscribed, "*Royapetta City, March the 20th. Her price is far above rubies.*"

THE END

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